

September 9, 1996

WWF: Kurt Angle, who won the gold medal at 220 pounds in the Olympics, received an offer from Linda McMahon. Angle has also received offers from at least two Japanese promotions, at least one of which was either RINGS or UWFI.

September 16, 1996

Kurt Angle, the Olympic gold medalist in freestyle wrestling at 220 pounds, was in the WWF office on 9/5 and had a meeting with Vince McMahon. They must feel that there's a decent shot of getting him because that fact was announced on television, but there is no deal done at this point. Interest has also been expressed in Matt Ghaffari, who took the silver in Greco-roman in the superheavyweight division losing to Alexandre Karelin.

September 23, 1996

There was an article in Nikkan Sports in Japan saying Kurt Angle had signed with WWF but we're told an offer was made to Angle but that thus far Angle hasn't accepted the offer.

September 30, 1996

It appears right now that Kurt Angle is interested in continuing until the 2000 Olympics and won't be taking the offers thrown his way by both WWF and WCW.

October 14, 1996

Kurt Angle has pretty much decided against doing pro wrestling.

November 4, 1996

The 10/26 show at the ECW Arena before a sellout estimated at 1,350 fans was said to have been a hot show... They did an interview with Olympic gold medalist Kurt Angle who did commentary on the match with Taz beating Little Guido. Taz said that Angle was the best amateur wrestler in the world but that he was going to show him the difference between the best amateur wrestler and the best professional wrestler. He then showed him a tape of Kenta Kobashi. Just kidding... Sandman kept the ECW title pinning Scorpio after Scorpio missed a move off the top rope. After the match, Sandman's son Tyler hit the ring dressed like Sandman and started hugging his father. Raven hit the ring along with Stevie Richards, Blue Meanie, Super Nova and Lori Fullington and destroyed Sandman including caning him in the eye busting his eye open, and finally Raven pulled out a cross from under the ring and tied Sandman to the cross and put barbed wire around his head and crucified him. Apparently this angle was even too extreme for ECW, because after intermission, Raven came in the ring out of character saying he was Scott Levy apologizing to anyone he may have offended for what happened. From what we're told, Angle, backstage, was really upset about the angle thinking it might ruin

his image and feeling double-crossed about being there and there were some fans who freaked out about it. It's doubtful he'll be back.

November 11, 1996

Kurt Angle was almost clueless on the commentary during the Taz vs. Little Guido match. They tried to put it over like both WWF and WCW wanted him but he chose ECW. Most reports are that the real reason for the apology by Raven after the crucifixion angle was because Angle was so upset about it because he does so much work in the community and has a certain image and felt that it would reflect negatively on him being a part of a group that did something like this.

November 25, 1996

In regard to the cross angle, Scott Levy said that he didn't think he should apologize and the fuss over it was silly because it was wrestling, but that since he is Jewish, Paul Heyman is Jewish and Tod Gordon is Jewish, that he could understand why apologizing may have been the thing to do. Heyman said that Kurt Angle was offended and probably felt like he was double-crossed. He said Angle's reaction was part of the reason they apologized but it was not the primary reason.

March 17, 1997

Former Olympic gold medalist Kurt Angle apparently worked on an indie wrestling show in the Pittsburgh area on 2/15.

October 6, 1997

The IWF PPV show was shockingly banned in Canada by Viewers Choice of Canada... They held a press conference in Sioux City, IA during this past week and among others things, announced that the three judges for the show would be Kurt Angle, the 1996 Olympic gold medalist in wrestling, Russ Hellickson, the current wrestling coach at Ohio State (which produced Mark Coleman and Kevin Randalman) and a 1976 Olympic silver medalist and Gene LeBelle, the former long-time pro wrestler, announcer and promoter and in a later martial arts magazine incarnation, the toughest man in the world during his prime.

August 24, 1998

WWF: Among those in the training camp this week is 1996 Olympic freestyle wrestling gold medalist Kurt Angle. Angle had received a big money offer from Titan and feelers from WCW after the Olympics but turned them down, although he did do one ECW gig as an announcer that he quickly regretted. After doing poorly as a TV sportscaster, he contacted WWF and they wanted him to train for a week under Dory Funk before offering him any kind of deal. His marketability after two years of being an unknown on a national basis is way down from what it would have been had he started right after winning the medal. For a trivia note, among the

people that Angle finished ahead of in the tournament at 220 to make the Olympic team were Mark Coleman and Mark Kerr. Coleman has also been interested in doing pro wrestling since MMA is falling on hard times.

August 31, 1998

Kurt Angle had a strong training camp and actually debuted with his first few matches over the weekend. He worked some matches with Dory Funk in his corner as a manager and was put over on all the house shows and got a big babyface reception. We don't have a report on 8/20, but on 8/21 he beat Shawn Stasiak and on 8/22 in Quincy, MA he beat Christian Cage (described as a Chris Jericho lookalike) and then won a Battle Royal. Funk managed Angle and Jim Cornette managed Cage and after the match Angle & Funk cleaned house together.

September 14, 1998

Kurt Angle has signed a multi-year contract with the WWF. His next work will be at the September training camp.

September 28, 1998

WWF: This is another training camp week with Kurt Angle, Matt & Jeff Hardy, Tom Howard (formerly KGB from the AAA promotion), Glenn Kulka, Jay Reso (Christian Cage), Andrew Martin, Matt Bloom, Brackus, Shawn Stasiak and Giant Silva at the camp and they'll be working house shows this weekend. Angle is apparently the star of the camp and is again being compared with Ken Shamrock as far as how quickly he picks everything up. He's not going to debut that soon because plans are to give him a major push and they don't want him shown on television until he's ready to carry the push

October 12, 1998

Expect Kurt Angle to debut with a major push early in 1999

November 2, 1998

WWF put out a press release that Kurt Angle had signed. The Birmingham News said that for Angle to sign with the WWF, he should be forced to undergo the same psychiatric evaluations that Mike Tyson did

November 16, 1998

Kurt Angle was the star of the training camp once again last week and they've got high hopes for him starting early next year

December 14, 1998

They had Steve Williams and Kurt Angle train together and wrestle each other a lot at the last camp. It appears that they are targeting March or April to start Angle off, with a big push, possibly as a heel. It's interesting to note that when ECW did its clumsy crucifixion angle, Angle was furious due to his religious beliefs and basically threw such a fit Raven had to apologize for the angle in the ring and Angle never came

January 25, 1999

Next WWF camp starts 2/1 with Steve Williams, Luc Poirier, Barry Buchanan (Poirier & Buchanan are still under contract as the former Truth Commission), Carl Ouelett (Pierre), Kurt Angle, Glenn Kulka, Steve Bradley and Tom Howard

February 8, 1999

NBC Weekend Today is doing a feature on Kurt Angle training for a WWF career. Dory Funk and Tom Prichard are doing a camp this week with Steve Williams, Carl Oulette (Pierre, who is said to have dropped 30 to 40 pounds and is in great shape), Luc Poirier & Barry Buchanan (Truth Commission), Dennis Knight, Jose Estrada Jr., Steve Bradley, Paul Orndorff III (said to be real green), Glenn Kulka, Tom Howard and Angle

February 15, 1999

An AP story which ran in newspapers around the country this week was headlined "Olympian Insists He Hasn't Sold His Soul to WWF" about Kurt Angle (current plan is for Angle to debut after Wrestlemania, but not immediately after). The story says that amateur wrestling people are troubled by Angle going to WWF claiming that "Angle's abandonment of his amateur roots probably shouldn't be a surprise in an era when once-legitimate wrestlers such as Mark Coleman and Dan Severn make their living in fake wrestling or the Ultimate Fighting Championships, a bizarre mix of street fighting and martial arts." Angle said that he never watched wrestling while growing up. Angle was offered a big deal by the WWF coming out of the 1996 Olympics, which he turned down to attempt to be a sportscaster and a public speaker. After losing his sportscasting job, he went back to the WWF, which, since his name value had dropped, offered him a lesser deal which he took. The story said Angle would probably be a camouflage-clad heel with a bad attitude. It hinted he may have another ex-amateur wrestler (who would almost have to be Williams) as his tag team partner and that his wife might be written into the storyline (he has discussed the idea about making his wife his valet)

March 1, 1999

Kurt Angle is going to appear in some form at the Pittsburgh Raw taping. He may not appear on the live show. The Weekend Today show is doing a series on Angle starting out in pro wrestling and they have training footage and indie matches and they wanted a big-time match, so they

figured the best place to tape it for the show was Pittsburgh since that's his home city and he's got a name locally

March 8, 1999

WWF: On 3/2 in Pittsburgh, the show opened with Heat tapings.. The Kurt Angle angle for NBC went like this. Tiger Ali Singh ran down Americans and offered \$500 for any American who would blow their nose in the American flag. He then pointed out Angle calling him a local Pittsburgh hero. Angle said No. Singh upped it to \$2,000 and Angle said No. Singh upped it to \$5,000 and Angle said Yes. Angle then acted like he was going to do it, but instead blew his nose in the Indian flag. Angle gave Singh a belly-to-belly suplex and a judo throw. The pop was said to have been disappointing for Angle, said to be the reaction of a mid-level face.

March 15, 1999

Kurt Angle is headed to Memphis and should start in a few weeks The Kurt Angle-Tiger Ali Singh angle commentary by Terry Taylor (who was better on his second week of Heat but still doesn't come off as smooth and was way below the level of Jim Cornette) was funny to me because Taylor got over Angle using almost the same wording that Bill Watts used to get over Taylor in his first big angle with Mid South Wrestling in 1984 when he faced Nikolai Volkoff. That angle worked huge at the time

April 5, 1999

[in Memphis] They are doing an angle where Kurt Angle wins all his matches in 30 seconds or less that seemed reminiscent of how Dusty Rhodes first got Magnum T.A. over a decade ago (or for that matter, how Goldberg got over)

April 19, 1999

Kurt Angle needs a lot of work developing an interview style because the one he's got reminds me of a 70s Bob Backlund which won't play today.

April 26, 1999

Raw for 4/19 and Heat for 4/18 were taped on 4/12 in Grand Rapids, MI before a sellout 10,671 paying \$212,707. They had two warm-up matches with Kurt Angle over Scott Taylor and Johnny Paradise over Scott Stevens. Angle will be in over the next few months but some are wanting him in quicker than others.

June 21, 1999

Kurt Angle worked the house shows this week against Tiger Ali Singh. He's not due to start on television at any time soon and will still work Memphis. They bring him in for dark matches at all

TV tapings and used him on house shows since they were in the Northeast and it allowed him to work his home city of Pittsburgh which was on the week run.

July 5, 1999

From 6/29 in Fayetteville, NC taping. It opened with a dark match with Kurt Angle beating Chuck Coates with a torture rack dropped into a death valley driver which was a totally sick move the few times I've seen Kenta Kobashi do it.

August 9, 1999

Kurt Angle's debut is being delayed until October or November because they don't want him exposed nationally before he's ready

October 18, 1999

Dream Stage Entertainment, the group that does the shoot Pride shows in Japan, is scheduled to meet with WWF officials toward the end of the month about a proposed show next year at the Tokyo Dome...WWF is also negotiating with Seikendo, which is Satoru Sayama's group, which uses name wrestlers from the Battlarts promotion and will be sending Kurt Angle to the 11/5 show at Yokohama Bunka Gym. Angle probably has more potential wrestling for RINGS (if they continue doing a lot of worked matches) than for American style.

October 25, 1999

They are planning on putting together vignettes to start airing soon to hype the debuts of Taz and Kurt Angle

November 1, 1999

Kurt Angle's appearance at the 11/5 Seikendo show at Yokohama Bunka Gym was canceled. Actually, I don't believe it ever was a finalized deal although it was discussed. Satoru Sayama, President of Seikendo, announced that Angle had failed to get a visa on time (this guy has wrestled all over the world as an amateur so the idea he doesn't have a visa is a pretty lame excuse)

November 8, 1999

Raw on 11/1 at the MCI Center in Washington, DC drew a sellout 14,407 paying \$421,031.. They aired a Kurt Angle vignette, giving his legitimate collegiate and amateur wrestling background. He was playing such an old style babyface that it looks as though they are planning on setting him up for a quick heel turn when it doesn't go over. His trade line appears

to be that he's the most celebrated real athlete in WWF history, which can be argued but WWF has never had a full-time Olympic gold medalist on its roster.

November 15, 1999

Complete Survivor Series line-up is Kurt Angle vs. Sean Stasiak (they debut Angle against the most boring wrestler in the promotion in a match actually designed to get fans to think Angle is boring to lead to his getting mad at the fans not respecting his talents and going heel)...

November 22, 1999

The Big Show's title win highlighted a Survivor Series that lived up all the promise that the line-up indicated. Unfortunately, that was not a good thing.... 2. Kurt Angle pinned Shawn Stasiak (Shawn Stepich) in 5:56. They figured this one right. Angle came out doing some really good 70s style wrestling and 30 seconds in the place was already chanting boring. By the 90 second mark, they were booing Angle and all he had done was a lot of good wrestling moves. Angle turned heel on the fans, telling them that you don't boo an Olympic gold medalist. Angle ended up winning with a Samoan drop. Angle looked impressive and this was the best Stasiak has looked since coming to the WWF, not that anyone actually picked up on it. *1/2

A second meeting with Naoto Morishita of Dream Stage Entertainment and the WWF is scheduled for 11/30 in Anaheim, CA... DSE wants WWF to send them someone like Kurt Angle to make a personal appearance at the 11/21 Pride show or send some people to the 1/30 Pride show to basically show the Japanese public they are involved in some form with the WWF to start building interest, although at this point no plans are for anyone to attend the shows yet

November 29, 1999

The Kurt Angle character will continue to be built around annoying people by always saying "I" about himself. Even though WWF did have Angle insult Pittsburgh before Raw started to make sure he wasn't cheered in his home town, everyone was surprised that even before he started talking he was already getting booed

January 10, 2000

Angle in Alex Marvez' column on wrestlingobserver.com was the first person I've ever heard saying that if you want to be a pro wrestler, you're better off not having an amateur wrestling background

March 27, 2000

The Micasa web site reported that the Kurt Angle "Intelligence, Integrity, Intensity" 3-I's were actually taken from an episode of the old TV series "Family Ties.

April 10, 2000

Kurt Angle was interviewed on the LAW and praised MMA calling it one of the best sports out there and talked about wrestling against Mark Kerr and Mark Coleman. Angle said he'd fight if the money was right, and said that Kerr had the talent but not the work ethic, and if Kerr had the work ethic, Kerr would have beaten him in the Olympic trials in 1996. He said Ken Shamrock and Steve Blackman were the toughest guys in the WWF and said he thought if they had gone into it that Chris Benoit, Chris Jericho and Christian would have all been great amateur wrestlers.

April 24, 2000

WWF: The skit being shot with Angle at Penn State on the 4/17 Raw about abstinence was almost stopped by local Penn State police giving the WWF a hard time about shooting in the HUB without a permit. The first skit took at least ten takes because the producers had a hard time trying to organize the onlookers to where it looked like a normal day at class. The second skit with the couple making out took a long time because the crowd watching kept laughing when Angle delivered his punch line and Angle also forgot his lines. The final segment had to be changed when one of the balloons on Show's head popped and ruined his hat, so they cut out the visual of his face after that point.

May 1, 2000

Kurt Angle's nephew Mark placed third at 141 pounds in the recent NCAA tournament. Angle won the NCAA tournament before winning the gold medal in the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta (and you'd be surprised how many people think that gimmick is a work)

May 8, 2000

The story Jim Ross told about Kurt Angle actually winning the NCAA championship in the heavyweight division while only weighing 196 pounds is a true story and it's actually an amazing feat if you understand college wrestling. The wrestler he beat in the finals that year was Sylvester Terkey, who now works under the name The Collector for Ohio Valley Wrestling. On Ohio Valley TV, they've been pushing that fact on television seemingly to build for a match between the two.

June 26, 2000

WWF: Expect Angle's character to be slightly less comedy oriented and more of a serious darker heel as a way to have him taken more seriously for a higher on the card spot.

July 10, 2000

On one of the NBC commercials for the Summer Olympics, they show Angle celebrating his 1996 gold medal win.

August 28, 2000

Speaking of the U.K., the TV show "Big Breakfast," a Today show like morning talk show had a poll for a rerun showing of their favorite guest of the year and Angle won the poll beating out Denzel Washington, Rob Schneider, Sisqo and the pop band All Saints

September 4, 2000

WWF: SummerSlam, after a slower than expected advance early, still sold out the Raleigh, NC Entertainment and Sports Complex on 8/27 to the tune of 17,002 in the building... Angle's eyes were glazed after landing wrong [in the main event], when the Spanish announcers' table broke before HHH had fully executed the pedigree on him. While most of the main points of the storyline continued, Angle was taken to the hospital after the show and held overnight for observation. The CATSCAN came up negative in checking for a concussion from the information we were given, but on television they pushed the idea that he was suffering from a concussion and memory loss. Backstage after the match, before going to the hospital, Angle couldn't remember anything that took place in the match after his head hit the floor when the table broke causing him to land wrong.

September 11, 2000

WWF: Angle had his bell rung again in the 8/29 Smackdown match with Guerrero and was foggy as it pertained to spots and Guerrero walked him through it. There was a lot of criticism, and justifiably, on WWF this past week for its handling of Angle, mainly that Angle should have never gone back out the second time at SummerSlam if there was fear, which there was, that he really had a concussion from the table breaking early and him landing with a bad angle. That and, after spending all night in the hospital, he probably shouldn't have taken that bump when HHH shoved him out of the ring on Raw, let alone done a match on Smackdown. The fact he couldn't remember his spots in the Smackdown match pretty well says it wasn't a good idea for him to be in the ring. The mentality in wrestling is that you, above all when injured, finish your match. And there is a strong mentality to work when injured. But the situation with Bret Hart, as well as the fact that in football they don't put players back in after a concussion, and that boxing has mandated lengthy suspensions after knockouts all speaks directly to safety concerns that there is no reason pro wrestling, as thriving a business as at least the WWF is these days, shouldn't have standards at least approximating that of other dangerous contact sports.

September 18, 2000

WWF: Angle was off the weekend house shows, although that wouldn't have been known (he was booked in Seattle and Denver) due to the after affects of what apparently was a concussion suffered at SummerSlam.

October 23, 2000

Rulon Gardner is now saying he's going to continue in Greco-roman wrestling competition as opposed to going into pro wrestling full-time...WWF officials portrayed it as if Gardner's agents' asking price was too high. We were given the impression that Gardner's agent asked for a \$1 million signing bonus and \$2 million guaranteed annual salary and WWF turned down the proposal and both sides broke off negotiations at that point. Considering Gardner had first talked about doing pro wrestling, and now says he wants to promote Greco-roman, you can draw your own conclusions. The WWF made Angle a big offer coming off his gold medal in 1996, which Angle turned down, because he'd never really seen pro wrestling and within the top ranks of amateur wrestling, the pro game, and WWF in particular, are considered a black eye to the sport. Many amateur wrestling publications have washed their hands so to speak of Angle, with none that I've seen even acknowledging the strides he's made in the entertainment world. For whatever reason, and I've talked with some of the top amateurs about this, the much tougher and harder to earn a living MMA world, I guess because it's a shoot, is considered more acceptable and even worked Japanese wrestling, because you aren't seen in the U.S. and because it's not as entertainment oriented as WWF and is a more realistic work, is considered far more acceptable even if the money isn't as good. Don't ask me why, but that is the case. In 1998, when Angle lost his job as a sportscaster in Pittsburgh and the name recognition and endorsements from the gold medal had dried up, he went back to the WWF, took a lesser guaranteed offer than was originally given, did a try-out and was signed.

October 30, 2000

Kurt Angle became only the second former Olympic gold medalist to win a major professional world heavyweight wrestling championship in the final match of the 10/22 No Mercy PPV from the Pepsi Arena in Albany, NY. Only Henri DeGlane of France, the 1924 gold medalist in Greco-roman wrestling, who won the world title in the famous "battle of the bite" match on May 4, 1931 over Strangler Lewis in probably the second most historical World title change ever in Montreal, has both won a gold medal and a major world professional singles title. DeGlane's win, via disqualification when he actually bit himself between falls and complained to the ref, who disqualified Lewis (there was no rule about a title not changing via DQ in those days) was a double-cross by Montreal promoter Paul Bowser on Lewis as retaliation for Lewis pulling a double-cross on Bowser a few weeks earlier by changing the finish of a title match and winning the belt from Ed Don George in Los Angeles. Because of Bowser's double-cross, Lewis was able to maintain title recognition and this led to another split of the title, which was a frequent occurrence in those days, with Bowser's world title generally referred to as the AWA World title. Angle, who captured the gold medal in the 1996 Olympics in freestyle wrestling at 220 pounds, was propelled in record time to the WWF title level. While Vince McMahon, with few matches under his belt, was recognized as champion, as far as serious wrestlers holding the belt, Angle, with two years in the business, and only one year as a major performer, had one of the quickest rises in history to ascend to what is the premier money championship in the business. Paul Wight, as The Giant, captured his first world title in WCW six months after his pro debut in 1996

and Salman Hashimikov won the IWGP title one month after his pro debut in 1989. In a sense, Angle's win came across as more of a pawn of a show to involve the other key players, but the involvement of Stephanie McMahon, HHH and Rikishi was somewhat compensated by Angle, who had previously not been portrayed as a strong main eventer, putting an Olympic slam on both Rikishi and a weakened Rock at the finish of the match. He then mimicking his crying at the 1996 Olympic medal ceremony as he clutched the WWF title belt. What was also interesting is that even though Angle hasn't gotten cheered anywhere except recently in his home town of Pittsburgh, and Rock is the most popular wrestler in the business, when Angle won the title, the crowd came to its feet and he received a good 70% cheers, which isn't necessarily a bad sign, because it says that the belt is over, hasn't been changed too often because they really care about seeing the change, and they were cheering because they felt they were seeing something important happen live, which was more important than their favorite actually winning the match.

November 27, 2000

When Jim Ross talks about Angle as being the only Olympic gold medalist ever in the WWF, he's correct regarding modern era, and as it pertains to major stars, but technically incorrect. In early 1978, Willem Ruska, who won two judo gold medals in the 1972 Olympics for The Netherlands and was actually a huge star in Japan off of that with his famous feud with Antonio Inoki, wrestled in the WWF. Ruska, who is actually featured in many wrestling magazine ads in the early 70s for "Bullworker" as the muscle man who used this silly contraption and got this fantastic body without even lifting weights and thanks to "Bullworker" won world titles in judo as well, was a blonde good-looking guy with an awesome, by the standards of that period, physique and Vince Sr. saw him and thought he was going to be a world champion. Unfortunately, then he saw him in the ring and it was all over, and unlike the famous Tom Magee story, there was no Bret Hart to fool everyone in the WWF. Anyway, he didn't last long in the company.

December 4, 2000

Some notes from the Ross Report. The situation with Angle's older brother, who I believe is 33 and has been a local bodybuilding champion, is he's working full-time as a fitness trainer and to go into pro wrestling, he'd have to probably give that up or at least cut down on it.

January 1, 2001

Angle will be inducted into the U.S. Amateur Wrestling Hall of Fame in Stillwater, OK in June. Angle joins a very select group of pro wrestling major stars in the Amateur Hall, consisting of Danny Hodge, Dick Hutton and Earl McCready as well as lesser known pro wrestlers from the 20s and 30s like Pete Mehringer, Bobby Pearce, Robin Reed, Jack Van Bebber and Russel Vis. To show how select the group of wrestlers involved in the Hall of Fame are, even amateur greats that went into pro wrestling like Verne Gagne, Leroy McGuirk, Wayne Martin, Dale Lewis, Joe Scarpello and Jack Brisco aren't inducted. UFC announcer Jeff Blatnick was inducted in 1999

January 29, 2001

The WWF is continuing its Smackdown Your Vote campaign, naming Angle as the honorary chairman, which seems to guarantee Angle is going to wind up as a babyface before long

February 5, 2001

Kurt Angle will be the next wrestler to have an autobiography put out on him. Just hope it's better than the Chyna book. Having talked with Angle, he has a very interesting life story, particularly when it comes to amateur wrestling and has what I consider a very healthy view of what pro wrestling is. A lot of great athletes have a problem with losing because it goes against their entire mentality of being great athletes, but Angle, even though he's very athletic in the ring, considers it all the entertainment business and does what is asked, maybe sometimes not to his benefit because he doesn't see certain things coming. Luckily for him, he has so much the total package and has developed so unbelievably quick that even trusting people and not changing things when they aren't always in his best interest isn't going to harm his career in the long run, barring an injury

March 5, 2001

Angle did a media press conference on 2/22. He said that his brother he expected would make slower progress than he did, but would eventually make it and that he's already passed some guys up as far as technical skills but is going to have a harder time with mic skills. He said his autobiography should be out in August. That may also be a timetable for a face turn, because Angle is one of those heels that the WWF book selling frenzy may not work for. Reason I say this is they heavily promoted his video, and it doesn't do the numbers that videos far lesser stars do. Just because he's led an interesting life and seems very intelligent and not a full-time worker (in the negative sense of the word as it pertains to wrestlers whose life stories are either fiction or fantasy) like many in the business, I'd think his book would be in the upper percentage of pro wrestler books. He said his WWF career wouldn't be the main focus of the book. Goldberg took that tact and most wrestling fans didn't like his book because of it

March 12, 2001

Angle will be inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in Stillwater, OK on 6/2 at the 25th annual awards banquet. Angle won the NCAA heavyweight title twice at Clarion University in 1990 and 1992 and compiled a 116-10-2 record as a heavyweight in college before going on to win the 1995 World championship at 220 pounds and the 1996 Olympic gold medal. Also being inducted is Kenny Monday (who was actually a much bigger star in the amateur wrestling world), who participated in MMA in a couple of matches including a win over John Lewis and a quick submission loss in a no striking match to Matt Hume on PPV, who was 1984 NCAA champ, 1988 Olympic gold medalist, 1989 world champion, 1992 silver medalist and finished

sixth in 1996. Tom Brands, who also won an Olympic gold medal in 1996 and was a three-time NCAA champion, is being inducted with them

March 26, 2001

"Off the Record" will do three straight wrestling shows leading to Wrestlemania. The shows were taped over the weekend when the WWF crew was in Toronto... 4/1 is Angle, which I'm told was a tremendous show. The most interesting thing was Angle talking about his wife telling him that he did amateur wrestling for 20 years with all the injuries he suffered, including a broken neck several months before the Olympics where he came back on it and won the gold, and now wants to do ten years of pro wrestling and she brought up to him when it's all done, he may end up in a wheel chair and he acknowledged it as a possibility.

Some Ross Report notes. Praised Eddy Guerrero and said that Kurt Angle was the most talented performer he's ever been around with his level of experience. I started thinking about that one, and I can't come up with anyone to dispute that. There are guys two years in who were very close in the ring but I'm not sure even naturals like Owen Hart or Jun Akiyama or Kenta Kobashi at two years in had his polish in the ring, and none had his presence, charisma or interview ability. It's so ridiculous to label someone a probable all-time great with this little time in, but barring an injury, I think it's as close to a lock as would be possible.

May 7, 2001

More Ross Report notes. Angle had a stinger on 4/23 Raw and had numbness and tingling in his shoulder, but worked the next day and it went away later in the week. Noted the WWF is going to send a film crew to Stillwater, OK when Angle is inducted into the Amateur Wrestling Hall of Fame.

May 28, 2001

Some Ross Report notes. Praised Angle's autobiography. It should be noted the only books he praised to this degree were the two Foley books. Put over where Angle talked about David Schultz, who was something of his wrestling mentor, who was an amateur wrestling legend from this area who won a gold medal in 1984 and was murdered by wrestling benefactor John DuPont while attempting a comeback for the 1996 games in a case that drew tremendous publicity

June 11, 2001

Angle was inducted into the Amateur Wrestling Hall of Fame over the weekend. WWF publicized it on TV. Angle is one of a very select group of pro wrestlers in the Hall, along with Dick Hutton, Earl McCready and Danny Hodge. Kenny Monday, who also won an Olympic gold medal, and did some MMA for a brief period of time, was also inducted.

Angle's autobiography is complete and is scheduled to be released on 9/18

June 18, 2001

Angle's induction to the National Wrestling Hall of Fame on 6/2 in Stillwater, OK, listed him as one of only four wrestlers in history to win the Grand Slam--The Junior (teenage) Nationals, NCAA championships, World Championships and an Olympic gold medal. Angle won the Junior nationals as well as the Pennsylvania state high school championship in 1987. The two medals (he doesn't obviously wear the real ones) that he comes to the ring in pro wrestling with are meant to be symbolic of his '95 Worlds and '96 Olympic wins

June 25, 2001

At this point the plan is, and this could change, for Kurt Angle to become the top star of the new WCW, a position originally earmarked for HHH (who actually, perhaps not surprisingly, would have been the one piece of talent working angles on both sides).

On Raw, when Angle came to the ring they showed a fan mocking Angle's three I's with a sign. It was tremendous because his third I was spelled "Ignorance."

July 2, 2001

As for the match quality on the King of the Ring show, it was above average, but somewhat sad in another way. With the exception of the Undertaker-Page confrontation, there was nothing on the show that wasn't solid and most of the matches were good. The last two matches were very long, and both were very good. The negative was the Meadowlands crowd had that dangerous attitude of sitting there telling the performers to "show me something crazy." The only match that really delivered on that was Shane McMahon vs. Kurt Angle, which was the show stealer. The negative is, that match was very dangerous in structure, and ended up being more dangerous when some of the stunts didn't work properly. By the time it was over, Angle had suffered a sprained tailbone, at first feared to be broken, a concussion, and needed five stitches above his right eye from a punch that landed, plus had a body filled with cuts and bruises largely from going through glass (as well as a potato shot by Edge as well). The last official word was it appeared Angle would only miss two house shows, the Last Dance in Louisville and Sunday in Spokane (the Saturday date scheduled for San Francisco was canceled several weeks ago due to poor ticket sales) and they are expecting him ready for TV next week. Unofficially as of press time, both Angle and Austin were expected to be very limited in what they can do physically for a few weeks.

July 9, 2001

Angle may work the house shows this weekend but it is thought he'll be ready to wrestle for TV next week. His CATSCAN taken was negative so his head is clear and his tailbone is healing. His knee swells at times but it's not a major issue when it comes to returning. Austin, on the

other hand, may be out a little longer. His hand has improved, but his back is really hurting him. At Raw, it locked up early during the show and he did the show in tremendous pain. Apparently the pain was so bad that he was sweating like he'd worked a main event match by the latter part of the show. If Angle didn't have enough woes from last week, a further examination revealed a meniscus ligament (knee) tear. He is going to work through it, but at some point he will have to undergo arthroscopic surgery. He was told it won't get any worse from wrestling on it. Quite frankly, this is about as good a time to get it done since he's already banged up and if he was going to take a few weeks off, a scope probably would only delay his return by a few weeks

August 6, 2001

Because Austin and Angle are so banged up, they'll be working a lot of six-mans as the main events on the house shows in August against each other with various sets of partners, depending upon where TV goes... Angle's latest ring injury is a groin pull, which he's working through, as well as working through the whiplash (no doubt from the back injury not being fully healed from the Shane match) and a knee tear (likely from that moonsault off the top of the cage in the Benoit match)

August 20, 2001

Lots of notes from the Ross Report. Ross heavily praised Angle's book, and if you pay close to attention to what he writes, which it seems everyone does, he doesn't go out on a lot of limbs about things being great.

When Angle got busted open against Storm, it wasn't that Storm potatoed him like, say, everyone else seems to do, but because when he took the bump, one of his medals cut open his eye

September 17, 2001

Some Ross Report notes for the week. Angle has added an inflamed bursa sac (elbow) to his various litany of injuries which includes a knee that is still in need of surgery at some point.

October 8, 2001

Angle's book (we should have a review next week) is going to debut at No. 13 in the New York Times bestseller list. A lot of the promotion scheduled for the book ended up being delayed because the original stuff would have gotten no coverage due to world events

October 15, 2001

Except for one thing, one could read Kurt Angle's autobiography, "It's true! It's true!" and be put off because of Angle's comments on himself as an athlete. Angle's confidence is such that unless you consider his track record, your first impression is that he's full of himself. Except, as

the title of the book says, the stories are true and when he states as fact he doesn't lose overtime matches, well, as an amateur he had more than his fair share of matches that went down to the wire, and in clutch situations, he didn't lose, including the split decision match that won him the 1996 Olympic gold medal over Abbas Jadidy of Iran after they completed overtime tied 1-1, and each had two cautions for passivity which was the tiebreaker. Angle was one of the greatest amateur wrestlers in the history of the country, and in a surprise conclusion to the book, he talks about his amateur career as something that isn't necessarily over. He was one of only four people in American history to win a high school national championship, and college national championship, a world championship and an Olympic gold medal. And then, in pro wrestling, he, as an all-around performer, after less than two years in wrestling, had already become one of the industry's best in ring performers, best interviews and had won his first WWF championship. Because of his background as a champion in so-called legitimate sports, and a sport that requires so much conditioning, this is the first WWF book that reads like a sports book. Angle takes his background seriously, because nobody lucks into a gold medal in amateur wrestling as it is one of the most grueling sports around because conditioning at the top level makes all the difference in the world. Yet for all that sacrifice, it is a sport with little financial rewards for all the time spent, which causes a lot of amateur wrestlers resentment of pro wrestling, which Angle spent his entire life hearing about and caused him to really not take seriously the first offer from the WWF that came his way after the 1996 Olympics. As it turns out, that was a lucky break for both sides. Because of his fame as a gold medalist being fleeting, Angle likely, had he signed, been like Mark Henry, rushed onto prime time before he was ready and given a monster push, that likely would have failed. As it was, he was instead able to start his career somewhat not under the microscope with a year in Memphis, after which time he was shockingly advanced inside the ring. Angle does have some bitterness about the Memphis period, embarrassed about his living conditions and upset with promoter Randy Hales for not giving him more interview time. The book in that way differs from every WWF book, which have ranged from really good, to really bad. Angle's book is not on the level of the Foley books. He's not the student of pro wrestling for a lifetime like Foley is. In some ways, Angle comes off as naive about the business, because after a short apprenticeship, he was in the big-time during the hottest period in the history of the business. He's seen all the positives, and while he's endured some negatives, in other ways his timing was perfect and while he hasn't been sheltered from the internal politics, he doesn't seem to outwardly acknowledge it. There were no great insights on pro wrestling, other than a healthy attitude of what it is and an ability to get past the mental block that a lot of great athletes have when it comes to losing to people they perceive that in reality couldn't touch them. The book being No. 11 on this coming week's New York Times bestseller list indicates it's a success, but because the Angle character isn't considered cool, it's not going to do the business that the previous WWF books did. But it doesn't read like a book where you read it and get a negative opinion of the person (Joanie Laurer) or feel the person is totally full of it on most accounts (Dwayne Johnson), although if you didn't understand amateur wrestling or know just how good he was at it, you could get both those thoughts because of his confidence and recounting his successes. The book has three basic themes. Growing up with an examination of his family, which was the best part of the book. Angle grew up in a home as the youngest of six children to a lower middle class family near Pittsburgh. His brothers were all good athletes, but largely due to a lack of discipline and

staying out of trouble, never reached their potential. He learned from their mistakes, and was so focused on sports, that when his father died, at first nobody could understand his reactions because of his focus on an upcoming high school football game. His father, an alcoholic, died when he was 16 and he was so close to his mother that he lived with her while training for the Olympics and actually gave her the gold medal. But while acknowledging the weaknesses of his father and his brothers, you can also see the respect he had for them and considered the death of not only his father, but others as sources for the dedication needed to excel in wrestling. His personal mentor at the international level, David Schultz, an amateur wrestling legend, was another source of inspiration. Schultz, a 1984 gold medalist was training for a comeback in 1996 at a different weight class than Angle, was shot to death by eccentric amateur wrestling benefactor John DuPont in a case that gained world wide publicity. The second theme is amateur wrestling and his college career, which garnered him two national championships at heavyweight as well as a second place finish due to blowing out his knee just before the tournament his junior year. Ironically, Angle was victim to the same size phobia that has hurt so many in pro wrestling. Being 5-10, despite being an All-state linebacker, he wasn't considered a Division I prospect and didn't get the scholarship offers that someone with his ability would have gotten, which led to him concentrating on wrestling. It's funny, because Angle noted, he's met linebackers in pro football that were the same size as he is. He wanted to play football at Penn State, which wouldn't give him a scholarship due to his size, and his second choice was to wrestle there, but the coach felt he was too small to be a heavyweight and Angle was the very rare amateur who didn't believe in cutting weight. Instead, he ended up at small Clarion University, where wrestling was a high priority sport and he became the school's most famous athlete. Some may get a bad impression of Angle, since he writes about himself with the belief that nobody can beat him, and he takes it so seriously. In the WWF dressing room not all that long ago at a TV taping, he challenged Brock Lesnar on the spot because he heard that Lesnar told people he'd be able to beat Angle because he was so much bigger. Angle made a point of saying he routinely beat people the size of Lesnar, including winning the 1992 NCAA title beating current pro wrestler Sylvester Terkay, who outweighed him by 76 pounds in a sport where a ten pound weight advantage at the top level is considered difficult to overcome. He also, in winning a gold medal, had to overcome a two cracked vertebrae in his neck, suffered before the trials that by all rights he shouldn't have been able to even compete in, let alone dominate in a weight division that year which had amazing depth, including people like Dan Chaid, Mark Coleman and Mark Kerr. With his neck nowhere close to having healed, as well as a popped hip flexor in the Olympics themselves, in the semifinals, he won a very controversial overtime decision to take the gold.

The Raw finish on 10/8 where Regal turned on Angle was originally proposed as the 9/23 PPV finish in Pittsburgh, but they went back-and-forth on that one before most likely patriotic fervor and the expected home town pop moved that one into the Angle win column.

Ross Report notes. Angle got seven stitches after his match with Van Dam, two in his lip and five in his chin, but didn't miss any matches.

October 22, 2001

Angle did an interview over the weekend on Jim Valley's pro wrestling radio show in Portland where he said that he was serious about going back for the 2004 Olympics and that the WWF has already given him the okay he could have whatever time off he needs to train, which would likely be about nine months of intense training I'd think to get into the kind of condition needed and break the pro wrestling "working with" mental habits. With the memory of some awesome athletes who tried comebacks after years away in most sports and more often than not they don't make it, the odds are greatly against him, although with his talent, if he can avoid injuries in pro that would work against him or in training, he would be young enough that when he gets into shape, he should be a formidable foe for anyone his size since his amateur career was based on him constantly whipping guys much bigger than he was. But if he goes through with it, since he's already in the Hall of Fame and has a gold, whether he wins the gold or even doesn't even qualify for the team, the guts it takes to take the chance after eight years out in such a tough sport and put forth the effort and discipline when it would be easier and more lucrative not to, is something that should really be admired. If he really does try it, my feeling is that a much gutsier call than the guts he showed winning the thing in the first place. While pro wrestlers have gone back and competed in amateur successfully (Yoshiaki Yatsu won a Japanese national championship in freestyle wrestling after being a pro for six years and not even competing while Dan Severn won some national tournaments after already starting out in Japan but he was still competing while doing pro), nobody from a major pro wrestling company has ever made it back at the Olympic games level

The original plan for No Mercy on 10/21 was Austin vs. Angle in a submission match with Austin going over in some form (how had apparently not been decided) but was changed on 10/9 before Smackdown to the three-way. Van Dam was scheduled to wrestle Shane on the PPV which is why, on Raw, they set up the spot where Heyman asked Ross who he thought was the better athlete between the two because that's where they were going and what was going to be the foundation (and also why neither Heyman nor Ross answered the question). Even though technically and workrate wise, Angle vs. Austin was very good, Angle came out of the match damaged by the lack of heat the match got. Austin is these days nearly immune from blame because those in power have so much respect for his track record and he's the most valuable guy in the company right now because everything is built around matches with him.

Angle's book will be No. 12 this coming week on the New York Times bestseller list. Looks like this is the level it's going to get, making it the first WWF personality book not to hit either one or two. This is about the level the history of Mania book reached in March, and that book had nowhere close to this level of promotion, but that's the difference between March and now

October 29, 2001

Angle's book will be at No. 13 on next week's New York Times bestseller list. It's telling in so many ways

November 5, 2001

Angle seems to be very serious about taking the off from late 2003 to train for the 2004 Olympics. He also just signed a new contract. In an interview with Alex Marvez for wrestlingobserver.com, Angle said that he took out a lot of behind the scenes stories of the WWF from the first book because he wants to write a second book more on his carer in the WWF. He also said he would have liked to have gone into more detail on his life growing up and people who influenced him. Regarding the Olympics, he said, "I had to leave (amateur) wrestling not just because of injuries, but I was mentally and physically burned out. It messed with my mind after eight straight years, whether it was the nationals or the Olympics or the world championships. It drained me. But the more I got away from it, the more I appreciate what I did. I decided after 2000 that I would try to possibly think about coming back for 2004. I would be in my mid-30s, which isn't so bad. A lot of wrestlers continue on into their mid-30s, some even into their 40s. What a story that would be. But it's not even for a story. I miss the competitiveness. I have competition in pro wrestling because we each want to be a top star. But it's not true athletic competition where someone is keeping score I've already got the go ahead of the WWF to start next year or in a year-and-a-half. I would have to be fully dedicated to training to come back." He said both Vince and Ross have been supportive of his decision. He said he's leaning toward it, but will have to make a firm decision over the next 12 to 18 months and that he needs to stay very healthy or he won't do it." Angle said the current product went stale and there was nothing interesting about the Alliance feud. He blamed the declining ratings on storylines not being as good, but said he didn't think things would be getting worse. He admitted being frustrated with his current character, but that he would soon have a consistent character, and admitted that a nerdy babyface is difficult

Karen Angle wrote this about RVD: "My personal opinion is that RVD is not ready yet. I feel he is very careless. When these men step into the ring, they are trusting the other person with their body. Even though RVD has been in the business for many years, I don't feel he can be trusted. Out of five matches with RVD, there was only one match Kurt didn't have to have stitches or was able to walk out without bleeding.

November 12, 2001

It's been a topsy-turvy week for the WWF, plagued with internal turmoil and more bad economic signs everywhere, plus planning storyline changes many are dead set against, yet at the same time, first day ticket sales for next year's Wrestlemania pretty well guarantee it will be the biggest live gate in the history of pro wrestling in North America...The booking, with the turn a week and numbing number of title changes to the point where most in the company can't even keep track, meaning few fans can either, hasn't slowed down. On 10/29, in an attempt to keep the audience from tuning out before the main event, the decision was made to tease a turn that would be delivered at the end of the show, with Kurt Angle. However, unlike the old days, where this would be the culmination of long-term planning, there were debates going on literally until the last day over who would be turned, with Undertaker actually the lead candidate as well as some talk of Chris Jericho (who they sort of turned a week later), and even talk of turning two people on that show. There were also debates over Angle's character, whether he should be

serious or comedic, with compromise apparently being he should be serious in the ring and comedic outside, a recipe that served to kill Steve Austin's drawing power. The dichotomy was evident on Smackdown, where Angle made Kane tap to the ankle lock in what was the best match involving Kane in a while and a psychology the crowd got into, but then Angle followed it up doing a goofy promo with Austin. Angle's explanation for the turn was a rare Angle interview that didn't come across well, as it seemed as if he was reading a script and very stiff. They did a second-take of the interview, this one apparently with Angle coming across as a much stronger heel, but the decision was by those in the production studio to go with the original promo because they felt the character portrayed was inconsistent with his vignette later with Austin.

November 19, 2001

On the 11/18 New York Times Bestseller list, the Angle book drops to No. 35 in the non-fiction category while the Foley book remained strong at No. 6 in the childrens category. There is a correlation between Angle's heel turn and the book really dropping, but in many ways this has to be a major disappointment even when he was a face and champ. A lot is timing, no doubt, but it really says something when Laurer's book did so much better

November 26, 2001

Angle, on his web site, put up sort of a disclaimer about his wife's comments on RVD, stating they were her opinion as a fan. However, in an ESPN appearance a few weeks ago, Angle mentioned a wrestler who broke his nose and then said he would refuse to dignify their name on the show.

January 14, 2002

The Binghamton Press & Sun-Bulletin ran a story on 1/5 (the day after the show) on Angle visiting David Szymanak, who was left a quadriplegic and unable to speak after an 8/12 auto accident. State Assemblymen Jay J. Dinga arranged the meeting, as Angle was his favorite wrestler

February 11, 2002

The Reno Gazette-Journal did a story on 1/31 on the WWF show this past weekend...Lawler was asked who would win a legitimate wrestling tournament among all the WWF wrestlers and he said, "It wouldn't even be close. Kurt Angle would beat everyone in 30 seconds." Brock Lesnar? By the way, the question as to who would win a wrestling match with Angle vs. Lesnar was apparently answered with Angle winning a close decision even though giving up about 75 pounds. Angle did an interview on wwf.com regarding the confrontation, which was the result of Angle hearing about a comment by Lesnar that Lesnar said he would be too big for Angle. Angle challenged him several times with Lesnar not accepting. Angle's description went like this: "A guy like Brock, he's 310 pounds and he's a tremendous athlete. I give him a lot of credit. I underestimated him. He's actually better than I thought he was. He's not only a great wrestler;

he' is a tremendous athlete. And I haven't wrestled in five years, so I'm kind of like an old man. I'm nothing compared to what I used to be. He just got out of college. so he's still pumping on all cylinders. To be able to get in the ring with him felt pretty good. Did I win? Yeah, but not by much. How would I do if I were in the same shape he was? I'll be honest. I'd kill him. If that hurts his feelings, too bad. It's just the way it is. He's a national champion. I'm an Olympic champion. He might be 80 or 90 pounds heavier than me, but I ate up guys his size. And until he realizes that, he's going to hear it from me. I'll never turn down a challenge. I've challenged him six times. Finally he took my challenge. I don't care how long I've been out of the sport; one thing I can say is that he'll never beat me. I might never beat him, because I've been out of the sport for so long now. But, give me two weeks on the mat, he's in trouble. It's a lost art for me, but I could still go to nationals and win it.

March 25, 2002

WWF: Angle has signed a new contract. Presuming it's a five-year deal.

April 15, 2002

Angle was on Regis on 4/4 talking about Angina awareness. Many members of his family suffer from the disease, and older sister, Leanne, recently suffered a heart attack at 42 a few weeks ago from it. She's doing fine now. Angle says because of family history he is constantly monitoring his heart and watching his diet. Should be noted that ever since that Brock Lesnar wrestling skirmish (which Angle won, but found he wasn't nearly as good as he was in 1996, which is understandable since it's been six years since he's trained at that level), Angle hasn't talked at all about the 2004 Olympics

May 6, 2002

Vince nixed the Angle Angina public service announcement from appearing on Smackdown any longer. It will still run on Raw. Believe it or not, McMahon didn't like the idea of a heel being portrayed in that kind of a manner within the time frame of the show he appears on. McMahon actually didn't like the idea of him doing the commercial at all, figuring that one of his top heels shown in that light would hurt the TV show. Angle has had 14 different family members suffer from either angina or heart problems and even failed his first heart test in 1998 when he was signing his WWF contract, although that was due to having the heart beating so slowly, like a marathoner, that they thought it was a problem but it was really a good thing

Speaking of Angle, regarding the Olympics, the WWF has given him their blessing to take time off, and they'll sponsor him and pay him his downside I believe, if he wants to try for 2004. Angle said that after his impromptu challenge a couple of months back in the dressing room when he beat Lesnar, that even though he wasn't nearly the wrestler he once was, it fanned the competitive flames. His feeling was that after five-and-a-half years away from competition, he was still able to beat a national champion who outweighed him, Lesnar weighed 305 at the time and Angle 235, when they did their match a couple of months ago in Fargo, ND. Earlier, both

guys had some fun wrestling Big Show. Angle noted that if Show knew what he was doing, he's so strong, he'd beat everyone, but since he doesn't know, they made him look bad and Lesnar was able to physically manhandle him. Of course, he also had to realize that Lesnar also was a year away from competition shape. Angle will make his decision at the end of the year, giving him more than a year to train for it, and said he's 50/50 on it right now. His decision will be based on how he physically feels as far as injuries at that point, because if he's not close to 100 percent physically, he isn't going to do it because there would be no way he'd win the gold, which would be his goal

Sports Illustrated ran a Scorecard item on Angle and Lesnar. The item only appeared in some editions of the magazine. Mainly focused on Angle, giving the storyline that his success ended the taboo of amateurs wrestlers going into pro, saying how many in the amateur community were against both men going to the WWF, but the attitude is changing. There is something about the attitude changing because of Angle and there is less of a stigma toward going pro than there was ten years ago. But top amateurs going pro date back to the beginning of time. Dan Gable was quoted as saying, "I like the amateur (wrestler) who thinks about entertainment, whether it's his flurry of moves or his style. We need more crowd appeal. We need more entertainment. We need better promotion. We could take a page from the WWF there." Jim Ross, who has always argued in favor of recruiting legit athletes and there is a mental toughness point about top level amateur wrestlers who have been through a lot of torture for no money. The story claimed that half of the WWF wrestlers have traditional sports background, up from 20% ten years ago. So, in my own curiosity, I did my own checking. Using the WWF roster as of about six weeks ago, I came up with 31% with what I'd call athletic backgrounds (college varsity, pro, or world class). Using the WWF 1991 roster, the number was 39%. WCW in 1991 was 41%

May 20, 2002

Angle told Pittsburgh TV station WTAE on 5/9 that he is planning on going back to amateur wrestling and train for the 2004 Olympics. The story made it sound like it was a final decision. Angle had been going back-and-forth on it for several months. According to Angle, he would stay with the WWF through the latter part of the year and in December, devote himself to what would be about a year-and-a-half of training for the Olympics. It is believed that the WWE would be paying him his downside guarantee while he was in training. Angle is also expecting his first child in December. Somehow I don't think those two things aren't at least slightly related. Even though Olympic training in many ways is physically harder than pro wrestling, he would at least train his ass off and be home, as opposed to the traveling associated with WWE. If he's really doing it, that's a huge blow, because Austin and Undertaker will be a year older and more banged up, Rock is probably going to be gone, and HHH isn't the same wrestler he once was. Angle and Benoit are going to have to be more important or the company is going to go through a rough period

May 27, 2002

Company is going with the idea that Angle is not leaving for the Olympics and no doubt will try and do everything and convince him to stay, although he has been given the option to go. Obviously, he's being counted on to be one of the company's major stars, and with Austin, HHH and Undertaker all having had their share of injuries and Rock gone, he's probably the sturdiest of the top buys

June 10, 2002

Notes from the rest of the Ross Report. He tried to push the idea of getting Angle away from the nerdy character and do a program with Lesnar.

June 24, 2002

Besides the Austin piece which dominated the show, Confidential featured pieces on Angle and Heenan. The Angle piece, which was tremendous, was taken from the "Before they were stars" video (which is worth going way out of your way to get). Talked about his background, growing up, his family, his fathers' death, interviews with his mother and one of his brothers, showed his Olympic training log (253 hours of training in one month, and you have no idea how insane that is). Seriously, I'd replay that thing on Smackdown when they do the turn because it was way too good for a relatively low rated show. He mentioned his final NCAA title in 1992 when he defeated Sylvester Terkay C (Predator in Zero-One) when he weighed 199 and Terkay weighed 275 and Terkay had a huge winning streak.

July 29, 2002

There was significant discussion and changes to the 7/19 Smackdown, in particular the finish of the first and last match. The original finish written by Heyman and Hayes was for Rock to lose clean to the ankle lock, since Rock was getting the title Sunday and Angle was the one doing the job. Pat Patterson (who has usually been on opposite sides than this on issues involving making new stars but always tries to protect Rock) and HHH both argued Rock shouldn't be tapping in a match to Angle, even though the gimmick is that Angle is making everyone tap. This is the whole problem right there about building long-term programs. They get nixed a few weeks in.

August 5, 2002

Angle did an interview for the 7/28 Pittsburgh Tribune-Review again talking about potentially going for the Olympics. At this point, most in the company are of the opinion he's not going to do it. His comment was, "Some days, I say 'I'm going to do it' and others I think 'no way.'" His wife Karen was also interviewed saying she doesn't want him to do it, noting that in the past three years, Angle has suffered more injuries than in 20 years of wrestling amateur. She also smartly pointed out that he's had six years off, is established as one of the company's biggest stars, and if he fails it could hurt his pro career. Kurt admitted it's a very touchy period to be thinking of leaving and said he'd have to make up his final decision by the end of the year. Angle was given

the green light by McMahon to do so, and was seriously considering it, but that's when business was good and the depth on op was much stronger. While he would be bucking big odds going back, because of his name value and celebrity status, if he were to make the team, it would bring amateur wrestling, the WWE and Angle himself, more nationwide publicity than nearly anything any of the three have gotten. Angle going for the gold, and this is a longshot, would draw enormous TV ratings and if he should win, he'd go back to pro wrestling with a chance to parlay that into being perhaps the biggest mainstream star in history. The story noted Angle having an easy time in a backstage match with Big Show eight months ago (which means nothing because Show has no wrestling background), and his backstage win over Brock Lesnar, although it should be noted Lesnar had been off for a year by that time as well. Angle said that he retired from amateur wrestling before he hit his peak, and would wrestle at 212 pounds. If he were to do so, he'd probably relocate to either Colorado Springs to train with the Olympic wrestling team, or Iowa, to train with that team

September 2, 2002

Some notes from the Ross Report this week. Ross said that Angle is on his way to becoming the best ever. Actually I've known people who have been saying that for more than a year. If you consider the best ever, the key is probably longevity and Angle's late start may work against him. Avoiding the crippling injuries would be the other factor, as that's what did in Kobashi and Michaels, who had all the ability but would probably never be considered the best ever.

September 30, 2002

Angle will be helping promote the first Kurt Angle Classic show from 11/8 to 11/10 in New Orleans at the Morial Convention Center. It will be a combination USA vs. The World invitational wrestling tournament plus a pro bodybuilding competition, a powerlifting competition, an arm wrestling tournament and a strong man contest. I believe Angle is only involved in the wrestling tournament. The connection with the bodybuilding world is that Angle's personal manager, Dave Hawk, was a former fairly big-name pro bodybuilder. The idea is to present amateur wrestling with musical ring entrances, personality profiles and high production values. On 11/8, there will be a team of the Marine Corps & Navy vs. Army & Air Force. The rest will be battles between U.S. world class wrestlers against top international stars, headlined by Cael Sanderson in freestyle and Gardner in Greco (Gardner's first matches since his toe was amputated after his being stranded in the freezing wilderness). In freestyle, Sanderson will wrestle at 185, Tim Hartung (Brock Lesnar's former college roommate who would be considered Angle's toughest competition for an Olympic team berth if he were to come back) at 212 and Kerry McCoy at 265. There will also be \$75,000 in prize money. I guess it's an amateur pro wrestling show, or a pro amateur wrestling show, or we've got to invent new terms. Both Lesnar and Angle will be attending the weekend activities.

Confidential had some good and bad this week. I think it would overall be not a good show for the average fan but I liked it more than most. They showed Angle going to the Olympic training facility in Colorado Springs and he talked about how it's changed since 1996, met a bunch of

guys there, showed clips of people training and he went through a wrestling workout with the national team members, mainly training with Jackson (one of the coaches). They also showed Mike Van Arsdale (another coach and former world class wrestler who made a name in MMA and looked unbeatable until running into the soccer kick of Vanderlei Silva in Brazil, and is negotiating to return to UFC). Angle once again said he would make a decision at the end of the year regarding trying out for the Olympics, and talked about his own fear that maybe he's too old. I know very few people (well, actually nobody) in WWE who believes he's going to do it. If he does, you've got to give him credit for having the balls to try. If he could pull off a miracle it would be the greatest thing ever for both amateur wrestling (because an Angle match going for a medal would be the largest audience ever to watch an amateur wrestling match ever in this country) and one of the greatest ever for pro wrestling as well and make him a legend in this world like nobody in this business ever was. But to do it after being off nearly eight years at 35 is a longshot. If all he did was make the team, it would be a great accomplishment, but the public may take making the team and doing nothing at the Olympic level as a failure and that's why the risk level is so high.

October 14, 2002

Angle, Benoit and Lesnar were given a long-term plan which the office hasn't approved involving the top level of Smackdown. For the time being, they are planning on using Angle & Benoit as the Odd Couple tag team, and obviously down the line go back to it for a singles program.

Lots of Ross Report notes this week and a very large list of injury updates. Angle has a hyperflex of his elbow but is working through it.

October 28, 2002

At press time, it appears the earliest a proposed Brock Lesnar vs. Lennox Lewis fight could take place would be in the fall of 2003. The plan was not to do this match and the proposed Kurt Angle vs. Michael Moorer bout on a regular pro wrestling PPV show, but on a separate PPV event with more of a boxing title fight feel. The Angle-Moorer match was said to be predicated on Lewis-Lesnar going through, but both sides are said to have agreed in principle to do the former bout. There has been talk of WWE hiring trainers for Angle and Lesnar, with names like Ken Shamrock and Don Frye having been discussed, to prepare them. As noted last week, if there are lessons to be learned from the Japanese promotions' mistakes, it's that Angle and Lesnar would need probably two months off the road, except for perhaps TV appearances to build up the fight, as well as coaching. Japanese who have backgrounds working with pro wrestlers, believe the time frame needed to peak is closer to six months to get away from the pro wrestling natural tendencies and away from the amateur wrestling natural tendencies, but these guys aren't going to get six months under any circumstances. The coaching should be from a coach with a background in power submissions. Frye, who may have trained at some point with Lesnar (as both had background training in Minnesota under Brad Rheingans for pro wrestling), is not a great submission fighter, but a really tough guy with a boxing and wrestling background. But his toughness and mixing it up ability is irrelevant under these rules. Shamrock

is closer to what is needed in adding skills, because Shamrock does have a submission background based more on using his natural power as opposed to being a slick submission specialist like many of the Japanese or Brazilians, but probably the Pat Miletich, Tito Ortiz, Frank Shamrock or Matt Hume camps may be the best bet.

November 4, 2002

Angle is going to slightly ease up on his schedule next year since his first child is due in a little over a month. According to a WWE web site article, he's agreed to devote 100% efforts to the company on his four days a week on the road, but will be home for three days every week. Angle has been on the road a lot more than the usual four days because he's so popular when it comes to public appearances and does so much promotional work for the company. He's said he'll make his decision in December about the Olympics, but I think the decision has already been made negatively. The company's bookings plans are strongly in the direction of Angle as a main player for next year. Also, his saying that he'll be home three days a week seems to suggest not doing the Olympics, because training for that would be a full-time job in Colorado Springs.

Ross Report notes for the week. Angle has been having some lower back problems. He was off the Jackson, TN house show to get treatment for his back and he's being taken off some house shows over the next few weeks to give him some time to heal.

November 11, 2002

Some Ross Report notes for the week. Angle had torn cartilage in his left knee and will need arthroscopic surgery soon. He's all banged up, which is the price everyone pays for having consistently great matches. He can work through it, and they're probably going to try and find a time when they can shoot an angle to injure him to give him the time off for the surgery, which would only keep him out a few weeks. Angle missed this past weekend's house shows, not because of his knee, but because he was given time off to rest and get treatment for his bad lower back.

November 18, 2002

Kurt Angle was given the weekend off due to his back and knee problems.

Angle was interviewed at the Kurt Angle classic about his pro wrestling career and his thoughts on returning. He said that when they did the Smackdown show in Colorado Springs and he went to the Olympic training center and wrestled with the current top wrestling stars, he realized he was in no shape to compete against that level of competition after six years off. He said it's amazing how much farther the top level technique in wrestling has progressed since 1996. He said he remembered how much it progressed from 1988, when he started wrestling first at the national level, to 1996 when he retired after the gold medal. He said he almost felt like a fossil training with the current guys, but he was able to get some offense on them using old-school

techniques just because they weren't used to defending them. When asked about a comeback, he said he'll ultimately decide in January but if he had to make the decision now, it would be no. He said he's got a back problem and his knee is banged up pretty bad. He said if everything heals up 100% by January, he wants to try, but the way he feels now, he probably won't do it. He said he thinks wrestling because of how physical it is, it would be a lot harder to make a comeback than in most sports. He said he'd have to compete with people who are younger, stronger, and have perfected new techniques that he's never seen before. He said the injury risk if he were to return would also be high. He said if he were to return in January, he wouldn't compete until May, and just wants to finish in the top eight. He said if people think he'll come back and win every tournament, they're being unrealistic. He wants to make top three by his second tournament. He said if he comes back and by 2004, only places sixth at nationals, he'll be happy, because he tried. Well, he might be, but Vince paying him probably \$10,000 or so per week to train for 18 months and if he doesn't even make the Olympic team wouldn't be all that thrilled. Someone brought up his doing the moonsault off the cage in the match with Benoit. He said it was his idea, and it was both idiotic and stupid and he'd never do it again. He said Vince was mad at him for doing the spot because he doesn't want him coming off the top ropes and wants him grounded as a wrestling technician. He said he's learned in wrestling that it's not important what moves you do, but how long you can survive and have consistency and longevity. He said when he finally wrestles Lesnar, and he hinted about it being at a Wrestlemania, that it would be a dream match like Rock vs. Austin and Hogan vs. Andre, but that his match would be a much better match than those two. Well, the only way it wouldn't be better than Hogan vs. Andre is if they wait until he and Lesnar are both 75 years old before doing the bout

November 25, 2002

Steiner's TV debut was on Confidential. They did a segment from the Kurt Angle Classic and boy was it weird to see Cael Sanderson on WWE TV. Angle put over Sanderson, Kerry McCoy (who has considered doing it at various times) and Rulon Gardner as guys who he thought had a good shot at making it big in WWE. I don't see it in Gardner, but have seen it in McCoy. Sanderson is one of the most awesome wrestlers I've ever seen, but his personality is all wrong for pro wrestling. There were clips of Katsuhiko Nagata in the piece, but he was never identified. Angle acted like his success has paved the way for more amateurs to turn pro, and they did show some of the guys saying that Angle sold out. Angle's success did open doors, but I think it's more due to Jim Ross and Gerald Brisco, both having grown up in Oklahoma where amateur wrestling is a big deal, being high up in management that paved the way. Angle said it was an entirely different field, the entertainment field. Angle said he wanted more amateurs to turn pro because with the exception of working with Benoit (who actually has little amateur background but was trained by New Japan where the base is real wrestling), Guerrero (who did amateur from childhood) and Lesnar, there is nobody in the promotion he can demonstrate amateur technique with in WWE.

December 2, 2002

There was almost nothing in this week's Ross Report. He noted that Kurt Angle would be getting his knee scoped in December, which means he'll need a few weeks off.

Angle's wife also gave birth to a girl on 11/25. Angle flew home, missing the Raleigh show, but was back for Smackdown the next day. I promise, there will come a day where he'll pay for that.

December 9, 2002

Angle will be having his knee scoped after the PPV. They are hopeful the five weeks between Armageddon and Rumble will be enough for him to fully recover and not miss a major show.

January 13, 2003

When Angle showed up still limping badly at TV in Albuquerque there was concern about him recovering on time for the Rumble match. There is no concern about him not doing the match as much as that it would be impossible for him to be close to top condition by the time of the match and expectations are high for a Benoit vs. Angle match for the title

January 20, 2003

Angle has officially stated, as if it wasn't obvious by now, that due to injuries, he's not going to attempt to go back to amateur wrestling for the 2004 Olympics

March 10, 2003

Angle had an MRI on his neck on 3/3 and the results came out that Angle had severe neck damage. He will become the eighth WWE wrestler over the past few years to undergo neck surgery under Dr. Lloyd Youngblood in San Antonio, which will put him out of action for about one year. His symptoms, shooting pains down both of his arms, numbing in the fingers and a burning sensation in the neck had gotten worse while on the South Africa tour this past week. His neck problems date back to amateur wrestling, as he suffered a broken neck in late 1995, and was not nearly recovered from it when he won the Olympic trials in freestyle wrestling at 220 pounds (against competition that included Mark Kerr, Mark Coleman and Dan Chaid) and later the gold medal. With all the bumps he's taken in delivering so many great matches this year, his body, like everyone's, is starting to wear out. What he's pointed to as the big blow was a spot where Brock Lesnar whipped him into the turnbuckles at the No Way Out PPV on 2/22 in Montreal. He still wrestled on Smackdown and all four shows in South Africa, but the pain progressively got worse. After the match in Cape Town with Chris Benoit, which was said to have been incredible, Angle asked to be moved to tag team matches the rest of the week and didn't work his usual style. It was said that both Angle and Edge (who went on the tour to give a speech before the opening match for good will) were in terrible pain on the 22-hour flight back. Since the situation really just came to management's attention on 3/3, alternative plans weren't fully decided at press time but will no doubt be the most subject internally this week. At the 3/4 Smackdown taping, they did an angle where Lesnar beat Paul Heyman in a cage match, and

Stephanie McMahon announced that Angle would have to defend against Lesnar on 3/11 in Pittsburgh. Angle took some bumps on the 3/4 show. Angle had agreed to drop the title in the ring if needed on 3/11 before getting the MRI. It was not confirmed at press time this would definitely happen or that he was 100% out of Wrestlemania, but that was believed to be the case.

In the Angle vs. Kendrick deal, the match was laid out by Michael Hayes, who worked as the agent for the bout. Hayes laid out a spot where Kendrick would kick out of the Angle slam. I'm not sure if this was the last spot at the bell and Kendrick was at first booked to last the 5:00, or that he had inserted the spot earlier in the match. Terry Taylor was talking to Angle about the match and said he thought it wasn't a good idea for Kendrick to kick out of the move. Angle went to Vince, who agreed with Angle. Hayes wasn't happy, particularly finding out it was Taylor who brought it up to Angle

March 17, 2003

The injury to Kurt Angle, has caused something of a continuation of what has long been an attempt to change the style within the company. Angle will be undergoing neck fusion surgery shortly. The surgery was originally scheduled for 3/17, but is being moved to early April. The planned title change on 3/11 to Brock Lesnar in Pittsburgh didn't happen when Angle himself asked Vince McMahon on 3/10 to allow him to do the match at Wrestlemania. Angle went to all the key parties such as Lesnar, Chris Benoit (who was to get the spot at Mania) as well as his wife to talk over his decision. McMahon was expecting that Angle would change his mind at the end, but he didn't. The plan is for Angle to work a real match as opposed to a short gimmick oriented match, and drop the title. Angle is expected to be out of action for a minimum of one year, getting similar surgery, from Dr. Lloyd Youngblood in San Antonio, that Terry Gerin (Rhyno), Steve Williams (Austin) and Benoit among others have recovered from and that Edge underwent on 3/10. Initial reports on Edge's surgery were that it went well. Due to the long-term damage in Angle's neck, there is no guarantee he will ever be able to wrestle. Youngblood had sent the company a memo after examining Angle giving the opinion that Angle should never wrestle another match. Angle has vowed that he will come back, and few question it, given his track record. Youngblood recommended an operation where Angle would get four vertebrae fused in his neck, and there would be no way he could return from such an operation. The severity of the injury is being kept quiet. Angle, because he wanted to continue his career, opted instead to get two vertebrae fused, similar to Edge. This will only be a temporary reprieve because he is going to need the other two fused, but is going to wait until he retires to get that done. Either way, at 34 and barely four years in, his career longevity and legitimate shot at becoming regarded as the greatest in-ring performer of all-time no longer looks good. A few others have also had neck operations, including Amy Dumas (Lita, whose injury didn't occur in the ring, but while doing stunts filming a television show), Bob Howard (Hardcore Holly) and Scott Garland (Scotty 2 Hotty). Steve Blackman was recommended for the same surgery, but refused, not wanting to put himself through the ordeal, which largely ended his career. Ironically, the injury to Angle will lead to Benoit getting the highest profile match of his career, filling the open slot in challenging Lesnar for the title at Wrestlemania on 3/30 at Safeco Field in Seattle.

While in Germany on a TV show there, Rikishi said that Angle's neck was bothering him so he could only lift 40 pounds with his left arm 10 pounds with his right. When you are down to curling ten pounds on dumbbell curls, things are really bad

March 17, 2003

The originally scheduled title change with Brock Lesnar beating Kurt Angle didn't take place on 3/11 in Pittsburgh. There was mass confusion live. Kurt Angle came to the ring wearing a hooded jacket. There was a distraction point with the lights going out, which allowed Eric Angle to come from under the ring and switch places with Kurt. The match started and Lesnar hit the F-5 on Eric right away. Lesnar went for the pin and got up. Michael Cole and Tazz questioned why he wasn't pinning him, but the story will likely be said that Lesnar recognized that it wasn't Kurt. At this point, Team Angle came to the ring and distracted Lesnar, and Kurt came from underneath the ring (where he went after switching places with Eric) and pinned Lesnar with a small package to a pretty big pop. Because the show was in Pittsburgh, Angle's home city, he came out and did a dark promo saying that the people in Pittsburgh always disrespected him, and that no winner had ever come from Pittsburgh. He then brought up Mr. Rogers (who is also from Pittsburgh), and said he's dead so he doesn't count. This caused the fans to start a Mr. Rogers chant in the building. Still, even doing that, Angle and Lesnar got a split reaction for their non-match. The entire show, as written by Bruce Prichard and David Lagana, was changed by McMahon on the day of the show. Hulk Hogan, who was originally to appear, was called that morning and told not to come. The original plan was for Lesnar to win the title. Chris Benoit had originally been chosen by McMahon to face Lesnar in a title match at Wrestlemania. The big debate as of the weekend was whether or not Benoit would be turned heel and put with Paul Heyman, or it would be a babyface match. The heel suggestion was to include Benoit to injure Angle with the crossface, giving a storyline reason why Angle would be gone, and have Team Angle then turn on Angle and become Team Benoit. Benoit would have also taken credit for being the mysterious person who injured Edge. The idea was that this would set up Edge & Angle to return together in one year and have a natural program, since it will be difficult for Angle to return and not be a babyface. The other idea he was considering, and apparently had decided upon, was to keep the Benoit character consistent and go into Mania with Lesnar vs. Benoit as a face vs. face match. The day of the show, McMahon changed the call after Angle confirmed his request from the day before to work the match at Mania, since it has been built up for so long and it's a match he's been wanting to do as the highest profile match between two NCAA heavyweight champions in pro wrestling history. Since he's never been so high on a Wrestlemania card, he would also be expected to get his highest one-night payoff of his career. and keep the Benoit character consistent and go into Mania with a face vs. face match.

On the Angle-Kendrick Smackdown match, it was always supposed to be a pinfall by Angle with seconds left. Hayes was the agent for the match and did suggest Kendrick kicking out of the Angle slam, but Angle didn't agree to it. The match itself was laid out by Angle. The first two minutes were planned out. The next two minutes were changed because Angle gave Kendrick more offense than was originally planned because he felt the crowd was getting with him more

than expected, and the last minute was exactly as planned. It did end up with heat between Hayes and Taylor over the Angle slam spot

March 24, 2003

Kurt Angle's decision to wrestle at Wrestlemania and Vince McMahon's decision to go along with it have put the company in a great risk situation should something go wrong. It's not all that surprising that Angle would put off his scheduled neck fusion surgery to participate in the match with Brock Lesnar on 3/30 in Seattle's Safeco Field. Angle has been looking forward to the match ever since Lesnar was given his first push, as the highest profile battle of NCAA heavyweight champions in pro wrestling history. It was the highest profile match of both men's career, as in some places, it had been advertised as the main event on the show. Angle is also looking at his largest one-night payoff of his career, which, depending upon how business goes and how the purse is split, would figure to be somewhere between \$250,000 and \$500,000. The extent of his neck damage won't be known until surgery, but it is believed Angle has four herniated discs. Two of them are pressing on his spinal cord, which has caused nerve damage on his left arm and shoulder. His surgery, scheduled for early April (the date is being kept secretive because of the belief if it comes out, it would be public knowledge that he is losing at Wrestlemania to Lesnar), is to remove bone from his hip and use it to fuse two of those discs. He will need a second similar neck operation when he finishes wrestling. There has been much speculation that Wrestlemania would wind up being Angle's last match. As mentioned last week, that is what was recommended by Dr. Lloyd Youngblood. It is possible, but most close to the situation consider that unless he gets injured in the Lesnar match, the odds are that he will return in one year. How long he could go from that point is futile to speculate on at this point, only that his career will be most likely shorter than anticipated. According to wrestlers he's talked with, Angle had brought up the idea of not coming back, but has talked more along the lines of coming back for as long as the pain doesn't get to the point that he could no longer put off surgery.

April 7, 2003

Angle's future may be brighter. After a story on Angle's condition ran in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Angle was contacted by Dr. Jhae-Dong Jho, a Professor of Neurosurgery at Allegheny, PA General Hospital, who read the article. He told Angle about his Jho Institute for Minimally Invasive Surgery. He told Angle he wouldn't need spinal fusion surgery, and recommended against it, claiming such surgery in the long run makes one more susceptible to future injuries in other body parts. He told Angle about having pioneered a new form of surgery, where, instead of fusing the vertebrae, as has been done with so many WWE wrestlers of late, he would go into the neck, chip off the bone spurs that were pressing on the spinal cord and causing weakness and reconstruct the discs with them, instead of bone from the hip. Instead of a one year recovery time, he said Angle would be back in four to six weeks. Ironically, one of the 30 or so patients he's done this surgery with was Scott Hall, in 1999. But Hall's neck injury was from a guitar shot by Jeff Jarrett, and his neck damage wasn't even in the same league as Angle's, who was told by Dr. Lloyd Youngblood, a nationally known neck specialist who

recommended that Angle retire, saying he had the second worst neck he's seen (Austin being the worst). Hall was fine the night after surgery, and was lifting heavy weights the next day. Angle had not decided which surgery to take. Given the choice, one would think he'd lean toward the hopes of this procedure. At press time, Angle was still scheduled to be operated on for spinal fusion surgery of two discs by Youngblood on 4/7 in San Antonio. However, on Smackdown, when referring to Angle, they simply stated he would be out of action for "as long as two months," which would indicate trying the Jho surgery. While Youngblood was lauded by everyone in wrestling for saving Austin's career, after doctor after doctor thought he was done, the time frame may also be something for Angle to consider. Austin returned after surgery at the end of 2000, feeling better than he had in three plus years. He had a strong year in 2001, but by early 2002, his neck was thrashed again, and even taking more than eight months off didn't help him.

Ever since we reported about Kane's pyro being a tip-off if he wins or loses the match (if the pyro goes off before the match, that means he loses), they've switched it around. **Another thing like that was that in the summer of 2001, when Angle wore blue, he almost always won, and when he wore red, he always lost**

April 14, 2003

Kurt Angle made the decision to go with the minimally invasive surgery techniques of Dr. Hae-Dong Jho, with an operation for his damaged neck scheduled on 4/11 in Pittsburgh. The decision had been one of considerable controversy because it was contradictory to the diagnosis of Dr. Lloyd Youngblood, who had been the company's go-to guy for wrestlers with neck problems. Youngblood had recommended that Angle retire, while Jho said Angle could be back in action in four to six weeks, although internally the expectations are that he won't be back quite that quickly. No exact time frame estimate for his return can be accurately assessed until after the surgery. Angle met with Jho again after Wrestlemania, and was leaning toward him until making the final decision a day or two later. In an article on the company's web site, Angle cited the fact that after taking a year off for surgery from Youngblood, that a few years later, Steve Austin is in need of another neck fusion surgery. While still not publicly being said, his career is considered over whether he gets the surgery or not. Austin, who at this point is scheduled to return to Raw in a few weeks in a role as a babyface co-General Manager of Raw to feud with Eric Bischoff (an apparent remake of the Vince McMahon-Ric Flair dueling owners angle), is not planning on getting any new surgery done at this time, since even without taking bumps, it would take him off television for months. Realistically, Austin came back after surgery on October 22, 2000, and quit less than two years later, in July of 2002 with his knees and neck in bad shape, although those weren't the prime reasons he left. After taking seven months off, and his neck still being in tremendous pain, he was told he needed more surgery and to never wrestle again. Of the other wrestlers who have had the surgery from Youngblood, Rhyno has come back and appears to be in as good a shape as when he left. Chris Benoit has had some issues with numbness of late, which isn't a good sign, but he did recover remarkably well and is still regarded inside the ring as one of the best wrestlers in the world. Angle's left arm had started to atrophy, as was noticeable at Wrestlemania, but has gotten worse as pressure on the

nerve had limited blood flow into his left arm. He did more damage to his neck by attempting to perform a match of the year at Mania, as he was unable to lift his left arm above his head after the match. His strength, way down on the left side two weeks ago, is now almost non-existent going into the surgery. Angle, who turns 35 in December, will need neck fusion surgery at some point, which he said will be after his career is over. He isn't planning on that being for many years. Because this is a new procedure and six weeks out sounded too good to be true, many were skeptical. The fact Scott Hall had a similar procedure done from the same doctor four years ago and recovered fully was taken into consideration. But it's also noted that Hall had neither the degree of damage that Angle had, nor is what Hall does in the ring remotely close to what Angle does, in as far as how much shock his neck after surgery is going to take. If Angle is going to be able to wrestle a few more years, no doubt future wrestlers with neck problems will be going to Dr. Jho. The worst case scenario is probably that Angle's neck will be back in bad shape if he returns too quickly, and would need the originally suggested surgery and be out a year.

Angle also pulled his hamstring just 20 seconds into the Wrestlemania match with Brock Lesnar, as its insertion into the tendon. That type of hamstring pull is slow healing, and is also more susceptible to it happening again. When Angle had an MRI done on his neck, it also revealed a cyst in his thyroid, that doctors feared was early stages of cancer. Angle wasn't told about the cyst until after the Mania match, but further tests done over the past week revealed the cyst as benign fluid build-up.

April 21, 2003

Angle had his surgery on 4/11 with Dr. Hae-Dong Jho in Pittsburgh. The surgery went well and he was out of the hospital by 4/13

May 5, 2003

There is talk of debuting Angle vignettes any week now. He planning on being back in the ring within a month. The numbness and tingling in his arm is said to be just about gone

Angle was at the 4/22 Smackdown show in Nashville backstage. He said he's feeling fine after surgery and is already lifting heavy. Those who have surgery under Dr. Lloyd Youngblood aren't even allowed to start lifting for six months, and then limited to 20 pound dumbbells. Bob Holly didn't listen and was lifting heavy after five months. Angle did 30 minutes on the treadmill the day after surgery. His only problem is a tingling sensation in his left arm. Lita and Rhyno, who had the Youngblood surgery, also experienced similar symptoms in early recovery. Angle said he and Dr. Jho won't know for another month or so whether the surgery was successful as far as fixing his problem, and if it doesn't work out, he'll need spinal fusion surgery that puts him out for a year. Angle had been needing Valium to sleep since the No Way Out PPV because he was in so much pain. His left arm at this point has recovered to 70% of the strength of his right arm, but there is a small muscle between his thumb and index finger on the left hand which is pretty

much gone due to delaying the surgery and working Mania. Angle's weight actually had gotten up to 250 (he's only about 5-10 even though he's billed at 6-2) before the injury, which sounds way too heavy, but he's now about 228. The company is wanting Angle to become a new locker room leader because he's got so much respect from the wrestlers. Several of the veterans like Guerrero, who everyone also respects and likes, have been pushed into that direction but there is the inherent deal of wanting them to also spout the company line that everything is fine. Overall morale of the wrestlers on both sides is bad, as opposed to a few months ago only being bad on the Raw side

Confidential on 4/26 was interesting. The focal point on the show were two lengthy features on Goldberg and a shorter feature on Angle's surgery. There wasn't much new to the Angle story. They aired clips of his surgery and had an interview with his doctor describing the surgery and what the usual fusion surgery consists of. They had an interview with Angle in his hospital bed that looked like it was right after he woke up from surgery. Angle considered it a miracle because his neck was pain free, and it hasn't been pain free in seven plus years. He noted he was living with terrible neck pain since 1996 and talked about needing pain killers. What was weird about the story is that even in a shoot story, they went into work mode. They credited his latest injury to a bump late in the Mania match with Lesnar, instead of when it really took place, a month earlier. They showed him landing on his neck and his face winced bad when Lesnar shoved him off, and then showed him taking the F-5, and claimed the injury took place on those spots. I remember watching the match and when he took the first bump, I was thinking, he's so screwed this time. It was as if they didn't want anyone to know that Angle was badly hurt when he went into the ring that night. They blew one hell of an angle at Mania for the post-match, but that's nothing new. Well, as it turned out, my idea wouldn't have worked because it had to do with Lesnar giving a post-match speech and even if that was planned, it wasn't happening after the missing shooting star. The idea would have been that he revealed, after winning, that Angle was badly hurt coming into the match and tried to keep it a secret. Angle would get mad because he didn't want it out. Lesnar would say Angle wasn't looking for an excuse or anyone's pity, and that he couldn't believe how tough he was, and then the hug at the end would have been a memorable climax to the show as opposed to something 90% of the fans wouldn't have understood. It also creates a legend in Angle, working a long match going in with a broken neck and nearly keeping his title, plus sets up a rematch at some point because Lesnar in the speech should have put Angle over saying that he won the match, but the question is still unanswered as to who is really the better man and that both of us, and all the fans, down the line, need that question answered. Of course, that was only if the plan is for Angle to be a face when he comes back and delay the second match for a long time. If that isn't the plan, him hugging Lesnar after the match in the ring kind of made no sense. At this point, Angle is hoping for two to four more years in the ring, but any number today means nothing because he'll go as long as his body holds up

May 12, 2003

A stalker who had been allegedly harassing Angle was arrested, which got covered by WATE TV news in Pittsburgh. Deann Siden of Inkster, MI was arrested last month. According to

Moon, PA (Angle's home town) police captain Leo McCarthy, "She would follow him around from venue to venue and telephone his hotel, telephone his home, cancel his airline reservations, threaten his family and threaten his children. It got very, very serious." The police reports said Siden had followed Angle to a show in Baltimore and through the airport in Grand Rapids, as well as followed Karen Angle (Kurt's wife) in Little Rock. She would call Kurt's home and leave messages on his answering machine claiming that she was having Kurt's baby and he needed to take responsibility. McCarthy said there had been no relationship between the two. She was arrested once in November in Pittsburgh. She had called Karen Angle and told her that she wouldn't make it through her pregnancy. She was arrested last month and is now in jail in Detroit awaiting extradition to Pittsburgh

May 26, 2003

Angle returns on the 6/3 show in Anaheim. It is still not 100% he's coming back as a heel, as many different ideas are floating around. The original videos looked heelish but the video that is scheduled to air on the 5/22 Smackdown was done as a face. It has been discussed for him to come back as a face, and turn Benoit & Rhyno into a heel team to feud with Angle & Lesnar as the top feud. At the same time, while teaming, there would be a constant tease for Angle vs. Lesnar for nearly a year and hold off on it until Mania, instead of doing it in July as was first planned.

June 2, 2003

Angle actually wants to return and wrestle before his scheduled TV return on 6/3. The plan discussed was to send him to OVW for a few days, but that wasn't confirmed at press time and Angle indicated feeling he wasn't that rusty and felt ready to wrestle right now. He started taking bumps with no pain this past week. Angle did a wwe.com interview saying that the company was going to let the fans decide if he'd be a face or heel on his return. It appears those who want him to return as a face gained much ground in the past week. If he does return as a face, the feeling is he'll be given new ring music because the current music leads fans into chanting "You suck." It's been noted that at many shows, fans were chanting that at him as he came out, and then cheering him the rest of the match

June 9, 2003

When Angle talked about his return in an interview on The Score on a sports talk show, he talked about the wrestlers in the company on a partial schedule and put them over, but said he didn't want to work a partial schedule. He admitted coming back as a face, and his goals are to win fans over and become the greatest wrestler who ever lived, and said he has as 50/50 chance at them

The current house show plans for Angle when he comes back is to do tag matches teaming with Lesnar vs. Show & Cena, which would be the main events at this point for June, although that could change weekly. At press time, the plan for the Vengeance PPV on 7/27 in Denver was still

for a Lesnar vs. Angle title match on top, but now in a face vs. face match. There is already advertising out in Denver, and national advertising produced for Vengeance with this bout as the main event. To me, this bout should be held off until Mania, particularly as face vs. face which needs more time to develop to make it special and you should want people to want the match before they get it. This may wind up with the crowd turning Lesnar heel. This is another problem with the brand extension as it stands. Unless they start moving talent to freshen them up again, which I think is pretty much needed, a combination of so many guys not booked to take the big step over the past two years, and thus not seen as top guys, and the limited amount of top guys, has left slim pickings on top now that they've split talent. After HHH and Goldberg run their course on Raw and Lesnar and Angle do on Smackdown, where do they go that hasn't been done repeatedly and is already burned out

June 30, 2003

Angle, in radio interviews, is now saying that he plans on wrestling four more years. That's carry for "until my body forces me to retire." Angle is 34, and most wrestlers when they get in their late 30s talk about wrestling until their contract is up or three more years and they probably even mean it, but when you're faced with the option of making several hundred thou a year going forward and not making it and being out of the spotlight, mentally guys feel they can handle the pain, since almost nobody ever voluntarily walks away from this business

July 7, 2003

The Vengeance main event has been changed from an Angle vs. Lesnar singles match to Angle vs. Show vs. Lesnar for the title. Perhaps they've realized that the Angle-Lesnar singles match with both as faces needs a lot longer and more focused build-up or it'll mean nothing. Plus, on the Smackdown side, it seems like the only possible Mania-level main event at this point

A couple of weeks back we talked about previous guys given the boring or no charisma gimmick in this company and how they fared...The other was Kurt Angle, who for a week or two they did the "You do not yell boring at an Olympic gold medalist" very early in his career. Thankfully, it was dropped almost immediately in his case, and his career wasn't ruined. Actually when you look back at how Angle's career has been handled almost from the start, it's a real testament to him to overcome such a bad use of his talents, although he never did overcome the mistakes enough to be drawing card.

August 11, 2003

Angle is working hurt. Not sure if it's a strained groin or another hamstring aggravation as have heard both.

September 1, 2003

Angle hasn't been quite up to the level pre-Mania because he's battling a multitude of injuries and won't take time off to get them healed because he thinks he took enough time off this year. He tore his part of his hamstring right off the bone last month in Japan but would need surgery to fix it. He's attempting to train the rest of his hamstring harder so the other two muscles can take the place for the lost muscle (this sounds like total insanity). He also has a dislocated left shoulder. He also has said that due to his injuries, he is not in the physical condition when it comes to stamina that he'd like to be (which probably means he's in better shape than only 99% of the population)

September 8, 2003

Angle was involved in the McMahon birthday bash in Phoenix after SummerSlam. He came in late and hugged Show after he did the bad spinnaroonie

September 22, 2003

A very misleading article in the Wall Street Journal on 9/12 resulted in WWE getting some unwarranted negative publicity for the idea it was stealing our best amateur wrestlers away from the Olympic team. The article, by Paul Glader, claimed that WWE has polarized the sport by head-hunting real wrestlers from the colleges and thus many of our best wrestlers won't be competing for a spot on the team in Athens. Of course, noted in the story were Kurt Angle and Brock Lesnar. What wasn't noted in the story was that Angle retired from amateur wrestling in 1996, and Lesnar in 2000, and neither had any further interest in competing as amateurs before signing with WWE. In fact, Angle had retired to become a local sportscaster, and turned down the WWE offer after winning the gold medal. He went back to them in late 1998 and signed a much lower priced contract than the original deal after other job opportunities didn't work out. Angle did consider last year taking a hiatus from the WWE to train for the 2004 Olympics after a backstage wrestling match with Lesnar at a TV taping in Fargo, ND saw him, with no serious training in years, beat a man eight years younger and 55 pounds heavier, that was only two years removed as opposed to six years, from high level competition. It was a move that many former amateur wrestling stars we talked with at the time thought was a huge mistake, even though if a miracle happened, all conceded it would probably have been the greatest thing that could have possibly happened for both U.S. amateur wrestling, and probably the WWE as well. But the odds were a lot stronger that Angle would struggle to place in the top six in the Olympic trials, as wrestling techniques have evolved greatly, and Angle has physically taken tremendous punishment as a pro wrestler. After a series of injuries, even before his most noted neck problem, Angle bowed out from that dream, citing his body was just too beaten up

Angle did a motivational speech on 9/12 at Westchester University in Pennsylvania. When asked who he'd like to wrestle at Mania, he said Bret Hart. That got the rumors going, but there is virtually no chance of that happening

The World Freestyle championships held in Madison Square Garden actually brought some publicity for WWE due to Angle. The New York Post ran a story about how the U.S. Olympic

Committee has banned Angle from using any reference to the Olympics as part of his character. They can't deny him the right to use Olympic gold medalist, because he earned those, but he's not allowed to directly imply that the medals he wears are from the Olympics, and while Takashi Sugiura can call his finisher the Olympic slam, Angle has to have it called the Angle slam

A correction from last week's issue on the 60 minute story. I wrote Angle had never gone longer than 30 minutes in his career. Actually his longest match prior to this week was an Iron Man match on April 29, 2001 at the Backlash PPV against Benoit which went into overtime, so total time was 31:31

September 29, 2003

Angle missed the weekend shows to be with his family after the death of his older sister, LeAnne, who was 43, from heart problems. In a sad irony, ABC news did a phone interview with Kurt Angle for a story on angina awareness on 9/14, just hours before his sister passed away. When the story finally ran four days later, the reporter wasn't aware of how the story had changed. In the story, Angle did note that his sister, who had lived a very difficult life, had suffered a heart attack two years ago when she was only 41. He has had 15 different family members suffer from forms of heart disease, including his father having two heart attacks before he passed away due to an accident at work. In the story, Angle once again talked about wanting to wrestle Bret Hart at Wrestlemania, and said that many people consider Hart the greatest wrestler of the 20th century. Whoa. I guess even Angle doesn't understand what the term serious stroke entails, or he's trying to pay Hart back for his compliments as Hart said, after watching the Angle vs. Lesnar match at Mania, that he would love to have been able to wrestle Angle. Angle said some have said he (Angle) is the greatest wrestler of the 21st century so far. Well, I can't say he's saying something that hasn't been said by many people and has claimed there are negotiations started for a match with Hart. This also may be a way to play to Hart's ego and have him overlook the angle they did in Montreal and make an appearance at Mania. Hart may, over the next few weeks, write a column which basically explains that he can't wrestle again, and I don't think he liked the idea that a story was floating around he was in negotiations to wrestle, since that isn't the case

Among the stuff cut out of the Lesnar/Angle Iron Man match on TV was Lesnar throwing a second water bottle in Tazz' face. Crowd popped big for it because they thought Tazz was going to get up and go after him. Then again, that may have distracted from what they were trying to portray. Another notable spot was angle doing a german suplex on Lesnar where Lesnar was supposed to do the flip over and land nearly on his head, but wound up landing more on his knee

October 6, 2003

Bret Hart wrote a Calgary Sun column talking about how Kurt Angle said that many consider Hart the greatest wrestler of the 20th century. Hart listed his opinions of the greatest of the 20th century as Dory Funk Jr., Nelson Royal, Buddy Rogers, Pat O'Connor, Leo Burke, Archie

Gouldie (Mongolian Stomper, who was a huge draw in Calgary when Hart was growing up), Harley Race, Bob Orton Jr., Pedro Morales, Antonio Inoki, Dynamite Kid and Undertaker. He did say if he was going to return for one match, he would pick Angle to be his opponent. The two have never met and Hart has not watched that much WWE wrestling, but as noted before, loved the Angle vs. Lesnar match at Wrestlemania. When he addressed the possibility of such a match (which Angle has wanted at Wrestlemania, but there have been no talks about), Hart left it open ended. He said he thinks Angle is the best there is today, and compared him with Benoit (his other current favorite). The story closed with, "If I ever could have a last match, it would be with him."

On Smackdown, they kept referring to the Angle-Lesnar Iron Man match as the rubber each, each having one win (Mania and SummerSlam). It's one thing that they ignore all the house shows and insult only their most loyal fans of all with this attitude (and then wonder why people think house shows are throw away and when attendance is down, they blame it on ridiculous things like football, NASCAR or the economy, which somehow hasn't affected baseball, basketball, football and hockey, which are higher priced events more than a tiny percentage). But they also ignored their pre-Mania swerve Smackdown match which Angle won

October 13, 2003

Angle called up Bret Hart on 10/1 and left a message asking him if he could wrestle him at Mania. The two talked the next day, and Hart told Angle that if he could do one last match, he'd like it to be with Angle, but then told Angle that it's impossible for him to ever wrestle again. The two had never met nor spoken before. Angle gave him the idea that it was his idea for the match, although other WWE sources claim it was Vince's idea that he told Angle about. Angle said that he's become a huge fan of Hart's from studying old videotapes, and mentioned the Hart vs. Shawn Michaels Wrestlemania match in particular. They got along well, and talked nothing about wrestling politics, and Angle tried to avoid any discussions of people like Vince or Michaels, and they talked a lot about different styles of wrestling. Hart was apparently perplexed thinking that the wrestlers really don't understand what a serious stroke entails. Actually, having seen a few interviews Hart has done over the past few weeks for Calgary news shows, I would almost, if I didn't know better, think he could wrestle as well. They showed him doing reps with 135 on the bench, which is nothing for an athlete, but for someone who had limited use of one arm not that long ago, to be able to do something other than dumbbells (because of the disproportionate strength on one side) is well past unbelievable. I bump into Brian Johnston, who is considered a living miracle, from time-to-time, and Hart's recovery is 1,000% greater and Hart is about 14 years older than Johnston. Hart wrote about the conversation in the Calgary Sun over the weekend

November 3, 2003

From an interview in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record on 10/28, when Angle was asked about the popularity drop, he said, "I would say things are better now than they were last year at this time. Every few years it becomes a phenomenon. It happened in the Hogan era. It happened in the

Austin era. It happened in the Rock era, and somewhere along the line, it's going to happen again—hopefully when I'm still here.” He put over the Smackdown brand as the show for the fan who likes to see good wrestling matches

November 10, 2003

Angle addressed his wrestling future in an article in the 11/3 Montreal Gazette. Angle listed his major injuries, which include two broken necks, three operations on each knee, at least four concussions, a dislocated shoulder, torn ankle ligament, deafness in his left ear and the hamstring injury that he's been quietly working through. “I had a few years of very hard (pro) wrestling, then I fell apart. Until this year, I always thought I was indestructible. It's been my best year for performance, but worst for injuries. I'd like to go another four years (until his current contract expires), then probably step down. But I don't know if I can hold up that long. I see myself more as week-to-week.” Angle will be taking the third weekend of this month off for his daughter's birthday

Angle has been doing a lot of media as well. He was on KNBR in San Francisco this past week, and because steroids are so huge in the news here (and nationally), he brought it up as it pertained to pro wrestling. Angle gave a response that a lot of people were very critical of, saying steroids are not a problem in pro wrestling because it's not an athletic contest, and it's closer to a circus. He said because the wrestlers work with each other and not against each other that there is no reason to try to do something to get a competitive advantage. Well, that makes zero sense. He also said Lesnar was 100% natural. The most significant thing from the interview was co-host Tom Tolbert, who used to be a huge wrestling fan and was often defensive of WWE when it was under attack in 1999, said he hadn't watched in a long time and had never seen Lesnar wrestle

November 17, 2003

The “miracle” surgery of Dr. Hae-Dong Jho, as it relates to wrestlers' neck problems, now has the jury out due to Angle's neck being thrashed just five months after returning. Last week, when he talked about going week-to-week, it was because his neck was giving him so many problems. He had an MRI done, but we haven't heard any results other than everyone was very concerned. He worked the weekend house shows but everyone was given instructions to stay away from his neck, or anything to require him to bump. He was told to do as little as possible to get through his matches. I remember when the controversy over the surgery was taking place, that a lot of people within the company, and many doctors who didn't believe in the procedure, felt without a neck fusion, the neck wouldn't be stabilized enough to withstand the rigors of pro wrestling. Angle's take was to try it, because it was kind of inevitable that he would eventually get the fusion surgery after his wrestling career was over

November 24, 2003

Angle underwent a second neck surgery under Dr. Hae-Dong Jho on 11/18 after Survivor Series. The cause for concern was that he has some numbness in one of his fingers, which he believes started after taking a hard chair shot a few weeks back from Lesnar. The scheduled surgery was to be arthroscopic in nature. Jho couldn't give any estimate ahead of time on how long Angle would be out, but Angle himself is pegging either the 12/9 or 12/16 Smackdown show for a return. Jho said it's not nearly as serious surgery as the one after Wrestlemania, and the feeling was he wouldn't be out for very long. The MRI report confirmed Jho's preliminary diagnosis, that there was a small piece of bone fragment impinging on a nerve which caused the numbness, that had to be removed. Angle was said not to be in great pain, or if he is, is hiding it from everyone (which most figure Angle would do unless it was debilitating pain), but the numbness was a serious concern

In media appearances, Angle has been pushing the idea of Benoit as a headliner hard, believing he could handle the position. He's said he thinks Benoit is good enough on interviews and considered him the best wrestler active in the company

December 1, 2003

Angle's surgery on 11/18 in Pittsburgh went well to remove a small fragment of a disc impinging on a nerve which was causing him some numbness in one of his fingers. However, the damage to his neck was more severe than expected. While Angle had told people he expected to be back in the ring after surgery by mid-December (I'd even heard as early as 12/9 as his target date), that was being optimistic. They are estimating eight weeks before wrestling again, so he'll make it back for Royal Rumble, which was the goal. Even after surgery, he was hopeful of being on television as early as this coming week, but not wrestling, but he developed a blood clot in the front of his neck which looks like a golf ball. It makes it hard for him to swallow and move his head in certain ways, and coughing is excruciating. In an article on the WWE web site, he said he's not going on TV until that clears up, which they're targeting the first of the year for. Dr. Hae-Dong Jho told Angle no more chair shots to the top of the head. Jho said his disc exploded on impact from the chair shot by Lesnar on 10/28 at the Atlanta Smackdown. Parts of the disc went everywhere and the fragment that touched his spinal cord was causing him problems. But he'd been getting tingling down his arms and numbness even before the chair shot, dating back a few months that he'd apparently been keeping quiet about until recently. He still feels the surgery he got was superior to spinal fusion surgery that most of the wrestlers with the neck problems have gotten, feeling fusion limits flexibility and he believes wrestlers who had fusion will suffer more neck injuries down the line

December 8, 2003

Angle was on the "Get in the Ring" radio show last week, targeting New Year's for his in-ring return, which is a few weeks earlier than the company is projecting. He questioned the decision to ban overhead belly-to-belly suplexes and said if it was up to him, based on the dangers, he would ban chair shots to the head before overhead belly-to-belly suplexes. He also said that he was planning on turning back heel to work a program with Cena. Angle needs to study the

careers of people (besides Ric Flair) who turned back-and-forth too often in the same territory. He still talked about wanting to wrestle Bret Hart, even though Hart has said it would be impossible, saying he thinks it would be the greatest match in the history of wrestling. While today's Angle vs. Hart of six or seven, or ten years ago would probably be a classic and it's meant as a compliment, I don't know how anyone can realistically expect a 46-year-old man who had a major stroke and hasn't wrestled in four years to have the greatest match of all-time

December 15, 2003

Angle was on Byte This and talked about Mania. He said that after watching tons of tapes of old wrestling, he believes Bret Hart is the greatest wrestler ever. He acknowledged that he wouldn't wrestle Hart at Mania even though both would like to do it, and said he'd like to face Flair (the two have never had a singles match) and called Flair the greatest wrestler/entertainer of all-time. He also said that maybe he'd face a UFC-type of guy in a shoot match, which I hope is an idea they aren't taking seriously. Word we get is that if Angle is serious about that idea, he hasn't shared it with management as there are no plans for something in the direction of a shoot match. The WWE tried a shoot match at Wrestlemania in 1999 (the famous Bart Gunn vs. Butterbean match) and it was a disaster. While Angle would probably fare better than Gunn, there is no upside to it, because WWE fans would expect Angle to win, and plenty of risk. Besides, works and shoots on the same bill aren't going to work in this country unless there was incredible hype and interest in such a match. I suppose if they get a UFC guy who can work, maybe they can pull it off, but I'm not sure about worked shoot style appealing to WWE fans either. Angle is coming up with these ideas because of as now there is no match set up for him on the show

December 22, 2003

Angle was in the Middle East this past week on a USO tour with Robin Williams and NASCAR driver Mike Wallace when Saddam Hussein was captured. One of our readers visited him in Camp Arifjan in Kuwait on 12/14 and he said his neck was feeling okay. He was in Baghdad on 12/15 which made a lot of national newscasts, based on Williams performing. He was mentioned in passing, with a lot of TV stations referring to him as an Olympic champion as opposed to a WWE wrestler

January 5, 2004

Angle was telling the office that he overall feels great, which is the same thing he was telling soldiers who asked when he was on the Robin Williams tour of the Middle East last week. At this point Angle is scheduled to return to wrestle on the 1/13 Smackdown show in Uncasville, CT, but that's just a target date at this point. There have been reports that Angle will only work a part-time schedule from this point forward, and there is always the possibility that could end up being the case, but it is premature at this point. The plan right now is for him to work close to a full-time schedule, although he will likely get a weekend off from house shows here and there. If

he comes back and asks to work less than full-time, there will be no problems in making that concession to him, but he hasn't even suggested it to anyone yet, and when the subject came up, denied wanting anything less than a full schedule. Angle's blood clot in his neck, which at one point swelled to the size of a large orange and made it difficult to breathe, has disappeared

January 12, 2004

We've been able to get more on the college records of the various current pro wrestlers who have won NCAA Division I championships. Not all records are complete, but here goes: Kurt Angle - The multi-time WWE champion and one of the biggest stars in current pro wrestling was also one of the best U.S. amateur wrestlers of the past 15 years. Angle, a member of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, joining Earl McCready, Danny Hodge and Dick Hutton as members of that Hall of Fame who went on to be major pro stars, compiled a 116-10-2 record as an undersized heavyweight because he refused to cut weight. His refusal to cut weight is what cost him a shot at a wrestling powerhouse, and ended up at Clarion University instead. He was 29-8-1 as a freshman in 1988, and placed in the final 12 in the NCAA tournament, which is very good for an undersized (about 205 pound) heavyweight. He redshirted in 1989, but only lost 4-3 in Carleton Haselrig, one of the few three-time NCAA heavyweight champion in history, during a preseason match, which is a result that foretold his future as something really special in amateur wrestling. As a sophomore in 1990, he went 35-0-1, winning his first NCAA title. He blew out his knee four days before the NCAA tournament that year, but still competed and won. During the 1991 season, he blew his other knee out a month before the tournament, but went to the tournament and placed 2nd, losing 6-4 to John Llewellyn in the finals. In 1992, he went 26-0, finishing his collegiate career with a win over Sylvester Terkay in winning his second NCAA title. What was notable about that win is that Angle, beaten down by a tough season, was only 199 pounds at the tournament without cutting weight, a size where most wrestlers of that natural weight cutting era would usually compete in the 175 pound weight class. On the night of the finals, he was giving up 76 pounds to Terkay. Angle went on to win the world championships in 1995 and the gold medal in 1996, weighing about 212 naturally while competing at 220 pounds, against people who mainly cut down from 235 to 245 to make weight. In The Complete Book of the Summer Olympics, the encyclopedia of the games by the foremost Olympic historian, David Wallechinsky, it stated this about Angle's gold medal winning performance and post-Olympic wrestling career: "Angle briefly became a national hero. In 1998, he horrified wrestling aficionados by signing a contract with the entertainment-oriented World Wrestling Federation." I don't know. In the list of someone's horrifying life experiences, Kurt Angle becoming a pro wrestler shouldn't be high on anyone's list.

January 19, 2004

Lesnar and Angle are both expected to be released to wrestle at about the time you read this. Angle at first was looking at 1/13 as his first match back, and Lesnar about the same time frame. Now it's looking like 1/20, although they may, as a precautionary measure, both be kept out until 1/25 for the Rumble

January 26, 2004

Angle has been training in the ring with the guys at the tapings and has told people he's feeling fine. He had been cleared to return a few weeks ago, but the company wanted to be cautious with him. Angle was on a radio show with Mark Madden this past week saying he doesn't think his career can survive another neck operation. He said he won't be taking anymore chair shots to the head and said he would be slowing down his matches. Madden asked Angle about the 2004 Olympics, and Angle said that if he competed, he'd get his ass kicked. He said he started to train for it, but between knee, shoulder and neck problems, there was no way

February 16, 2004

Angle did an interview with the Tacoma News Tribune to hype the Smackdown tapings. The story said he was bummed out by working as a face. "I'm a lot more entertaining as a bad guy. I can make a (jerk) out of myself. It's harder to be the good guy. You're very limited. I can't be the nerd now." Unfortunately for Angle, the same nerd character that got him over at first as a high mid-carder, is the reason why he's had a hard time being a draw in a headline position

March 8, 2004

The New York Times ran an article on 2/25 about Angle, and WWE's recruiting athletes from football and amateur wrestling.

March 22, 2004

After the (draft) decision was made, the company got worse news the morning after Wrestlemania when Kurt Angle called and said he was numb in his fingers once again. Whether it was from the match, or Angle has been keeping an injury quiet and working through the big show, was unclear. He is scheduled to undergo an MRI this week to see what the damage is, but based on what Angle had told people, there is tremendous concern about his future. He's coming off two neck surgeries in the past year, and has been told that another one could be it for him. He's been taken off the active roster. In addition, Ric Flair is also set for different tests to see what the neck damage he has, and has been working with. Flair has numbness in the three middle fingers on his left hand and can't grip well. He was telling people over the weekend he's decided against taking time off, and will try and rehab it through using traction during the week. Big Show was also scheduled to undergo arthroscopic surgery on his elbow and both knees after Wrestlemania. When Lesnar left, Show, recognizing the situation, postponed his surgeries, which would keep him out two to three months, for a few weeks. With Angle down as well, the last word is he's postponed surgery indefinitely, but he's hurting.

March 29, 2004

-The company's good news is that after consulting with two different doctors on 3/17 and 3/18, Angle was told he wouldn't need surgery, which was feared earlier in the week that it could end

his career. As things stand right now, Angle looks to be out of action for only a few weeks. At that point, he would return, but would only be working a limited schedule, and the limited schedule is at this point looked at being a permanent thing. When Angle showed up as new commissioner of Smackdown on 3/23 in Grand Rapids, he said he was giving up wrestling for now.

-The USA Today story on the high death rate of pro wrestlers, and the "Mania behind Wrestlemania" special that aired on UPN later that night made some scary statements that the industry itself probably doesn't recognize, and that few seem to have put together... There was a lot of backstage footage of out-of-character thoughts, most notably by Austin and Angle, as they defied medical logic and not only participated, but had great matches... Angle, numb in his fingers, a similar condition to that in which Ric Flair worked this year (and most likely, he did as well), tried to put on a match of the year with Lesnar. Despite tremendous and noticeable weakness that the announcers even felt they had to acknowledge, on one side of his body, and under the mental strain that this also might be the last match of his career, he came one botched move from doing so. As it turned out, both men would be messed up by the end of the night. Lesnar landed on his head attempting a shooting star press, the planned finishing move. It was a move he had never botched in his career, whether in the ring in OVW, or in WWE dark matches (he had never done it on a major WWE show, saving it for Wrestlemania because the company warned him against making it a regular part of his repertoire, trying to save his knees for the long haul), or in practice. He was shown behaving backstage like a wounded grizzly bear, as a shoot reacting like tough-guy wrestlers like Austin or Undertaker would work angles of not wanting medical attention for a skit on television. Angle wasn't satisfied with simply getting through a passable match and being professional enough to drop the title, even though he had no business wrestling. But later that night, his body shut down when his adrenaline wore off and he started uncontrollably shaking and shivering. Angle also admitted in the piece that he was, and has been in so much neck pain, literally for years (the injury dated back to the 1996 Olympic trials) that he couldn't function without pain killers. It was a statement that few acknowledged, since Angle, to the public, doesn't fit the messed up profile people expect those who are chemically dependent to fit under. The special was excellent, and in a sense portrayed Angle and Austin as heroic for what they accomplished with the potential ends of each's career staring at them. But it's that same value structure of taking your body past the limits of sanity to an outsider that is the pressure all top wrestlers emulate, and some get caught up in a bad situation due to it. It can and has led to addictions, and worse. Wrestling has a tremendously high death rate and drug problem. On one night, three of the top wrestlers for three different reasons, either took tremendous risks, or had bad luck. Austin was afraid he was going to die. If Angle wasn't afraid he could end up paralyzed, it wasn't as if his wife and friends weren't, as Jericho noted, saying he really didn't want to watch the match. I can remember myself, and while it was a great match, cringing at every bump and constantly hoping it would end, and that the idea that Angle didn't hurt himself worse made something like how many stars it would end up getting seem far less than insignificant. And Lesnar, well, if he was a normal human being without the years of neck training from amateur wrestling, he could have easily been paralyzed as well. The gods were both with them and against them on that night. But in wrestling, the gods aren't always on your side.

April 26, 2004

The first victim of the Smackdown ratings decline appears to have been Kurt Angle. They did an Angle where Big Show retired (so he could have the needed knee surgery that will keep him out of action for 2-3 months) after losing to Guerrero, and then he went crazy and choke slammed Angle off the second floor of the building. At the live show, they announced Booker as the new G.M., which makes even less sense.

May 3, 2004

Despite the angle on Smackdown, there are no plans right now to build to an Angle vs. Show program

May 10, 2004

Kurt Angle talked like a wrestler who is beginning to concede his career may really be headed into its final stretch when he did media appearances on 4/29 in Toronto. Angle, 35, is in his sixth year of a career that skyrocketed to the top, but never quite reached the level it should have. This was due more to being saddled with a geeky character that it was easy to entertain the audiences and get them to react to, but a character that it wasn't easy to get audiences to pay money to see when put in a headliner role. He informed company officials this past week, and also mentioned in several media interviews, that he will be undergoing his third neck operation shortly, due to the fact he has no feeling in the little finger in one of his hands. This operation will be on different vertebrae from the past, and will again be done by Dr. Hae-Dong Jho in Pittsburgh. Angle is hopeful to be able to return in time for SummerSlam. On television, to explain his absence from the ring, they are claiming that Angle's career is over as a wrestler due to injuries suffered to his knee. Angle's original surgery, just one year ago, was controversial because it was largely experimental. The WWE had been working with Dr. Lloyd Youngblood of San Antonio when it came to neck problems. Youngblood had operated on many of the company's biggest names including Steve Austin, Edge, Rhyno, Chris Benoit, Lita and Bob Holly in recent years. Austin, whose damage dated back years and was also partially due to a congenital narrowing of the spine combined with a botched tombstone piledriver in a 1997 match with Owen Hart, was the only wrestler from that group under Youngblood who isn't still active today. The rest have suffered no serious ill effects. Angle, however, needed a second surgery later in the year after taking a chair shot to the head, and has been out of action since Wrestlemania when he reported suffering numbness in his hand again. Angle signed a five-year contract in 2002, and said on FAN radio in Toronto that his goal is to finish the deal, and that if he could do so, he'd be happy with his career. He said he's not sure if he'll be able to do so. Angle later conceded on TSN's "Off the Record" with Michael Landsberg in an interview the same day, that he recognizes he may end up like the Bo Jackson of his sport, someone with potential to be the best ever, but due to injuries, never will reach that level. He conceded he may never reach the level of Steve Austin, Rock or Bret Hart because he won't have the longevity going for him. He said he would like to wrestle Bret Hart at next year's Wrestlemania, although

that may have been the political thing to say since they were in Canada, saying he thinks they could have the greatest match of all-time. Well, I'm sure Bret Hart of the 90s vs. Kurt Angle of 2002, or even today, could have been a classic. There is something about the term "major stroke." that doesn't seem to register with a lot of people. He said he's also worried that the company won't push him as hard, due to his frequent absences and his fragile neck, when he returns. Angle spoke on the show about his 2003 Mania match with Brock Lesnar, noting he only had 20% strength during the match and he just wanted to survive it, but that both he and Lesnar were physical disasters after the match. He said he went into shock, and was shaking and numb.

May 31, 2004

The update on Angle at this point is that he is probably not going to undergo neck surgery at this time. Angle will be out of the ring rehabbing for the next few months. The plans right now are for him to return to the ring around August, with SummerSlam as the target, and work a part-time schedule at that point. The current G.M. role, which there is considerable debate about, is in their mind, a way to keep him on television while he can't wrestle. My feeling is that right now, this role has hurt Angle to the point where as a fan, I don't see how you can be "waiting" for his return because the role seems to have taken him down. There is the feeling that they are paying him so much they want value, but sometimes it's better for a guy to be gone, and then the last few weeks, start building for a big return.

June 14, 2004

Angle is targeting SummerSlam for his first match back, but it's very much iffy. He told Kevin MacKenzie that in hindsight, he felt he rushed back too quickly after both of the last two operations.

June 28, 2004

Funaki interviewed Angle for Japan. The subject of shootfighting came up. Angle said he was a big fan of UFC and Pride, and had he been approached five years ago about doing it, with the kind of money they were offering today, he'd have considered it. The one thing that would have made him question doing it is that it's impossible to win all your fights. Angle noted that he knew Mark Coleman, Mark Kerr and Kevin Randleman from his wrestling days. He said that now, he's too badly injured to consider doing it

July 5, 2004

As things currently stand, plan for SummerSlam on the Smackdown side is JBL vs. Undertaker for the title, with Undertaker as a face, and Guerrero vs. Kurt Angle. Angle is already medically cleared to wrestle after resting his often injured neck, but the plan right now is to hold his return off until SummerSlam. Angle could also work against Cena, since that was his main rival as G.M., if Guerrero is put in the title mix. Working with Guerrero in a single would put a lot of

pressure on Angle in what would likely be his first match back, because fans would be expecting a great match.

July 12, 2004

Angle did an interview on the Rove McManus radio show in Australia and basically said he would be back wrestling when the tour comes to Australia in late August. He also said Show would be back by then. Even though it was a WWE interview plugging the Smackdown show in Fayetteville, when Angle was asked, which was better, pro wrestling or amateur, he said, "The Olympics was the all-time best. If I had to trade in one or the other, I would give (pro wrestling) up in a minute. When you win at the Olympics, you're the best in the world." He said he was a celebrity coming off the Olympics, appearing on Leno and Letterman, but six months later, "I'd fallen off the face of the Earth."

July 19, 2004

Angle was the subject of a full page article in the 7/8 Melbourne (Australia) Herald Sun. The story about the deaths of his older sister, his father and David Schultz. He said he was injecting Novocain directly into his neck in 1996 during the U.S. Olympic trials. On his decision to join WWF, he said, "The reaction I got from coaches, peers and the fans was very negative. I was considered a leader, an ambassador...I was the best wrestler in my weight class in the world and the best in America, period." Angle said he believed he's done more for amateur wrestling being in the WWE than from winning the Olympics because of the far greater weekly television exposure. He said his goal is to be like Rock and become an actor, but that he loved pro wrestling and wouldn't want to leave it. He said he wants to keep WWE as his prime focus. Angle actually broke ranks in a recent interview on Jeff Marek's mainstream radio show in Toronto. Angle talked about the writing not being up to par, and actually said that how much can you see of HHH. He came to the studio on crutches and basically said not to ask about why he's doing the crutches bit, which is of course, the office trying to have him keep with his storyline

July 26, 2004

WWE's "Return of the Deadman," two-day tour, running consecutive nights at Budokan Hall in Tokyo, was from all accounts, a pair of great live shows with super crowd reactions and did more than \$1 million live gates both nights. The tour featured the unadvertised return of Kurt Angle, as the sold out second night main event was changed from a John Bradshaw Layfield vs. Undertaker vs. Eddie Guerrero three-way, to a tag with Guerrero & Undertaker vs. JBL & Kurt Angle after an angle on the first show where Angle's interference saved JBL's title in a match with Guerrero. This led to Shane McMahon, presented last, like he was the star of the show, coming out at the end and announcing the new match for the next night. Guerrero pulled his hamstring, the second time in two weeks he's suffered a similar injury, during the match the first night. To camouflage that Guerrero couldn't work the second night, they borrowed from one of the most famous matches in Japanese history, the often repeated 1977 All Japan tag tournament finals with Dory & Terry Funk vs. The Sheik & Abdullah the Butcher. Guerrero was

hit with a chair by Angle, actually right at the start of the match, and taken backstage. Undertaker worked almost the entire match as a handicap bout, until finally getting overpowered, taking both the Angle slam and JBL clothesline. Undertaker actually kicked out before Guerrero made the save, limping to the ring. Undertaker choke slammed JBL and Guerrero pinned him in 19:39 with a frog splash to end the tour. Undertaker then gave Angle a tombstone piledriver (granted, Undertaker doesn't have a rep for hurting people, but doing that move on Angle at this stage is insane, as one slip up and his career is over and it's needless when the match is already over and he can take a safer choke slam just as easily). Guerrero told the fans "Domo Arigato" after the match, which ended the tour. Report were that Angle looked very good in his first match since Wrestlemania, although aside from the tombstone spot, he kept the risky stuff to a minimum.

August 16, 2004

-SUMMER OLYMPIANS IN PRO WRESTLING/MMA... ANGLE, KURT - The 1996 gold medalist at 220 pounds in freestyle wrestling, winning just a few months after breaking his neck in the national championships. As world champion in the weight class in 1995 as well, Angle is the only man in history who was the best in the world at both amateur wrestling and pro wrestling (Most Outstanding Wrestler 2001, 2002, 2003; Wrestler of the Year 2002) in history. Angle defeated Abbas Jadidy of Iran , who was coming off a two-year suspension for testing positive for steroids in the 1993 world championships that he had won. The two went to a 1-1 draw, and neither scored in sudden death overtime. They were also even, with each getting two passivity calls against them. The decision went to a vote, and it was close enough to where it could have gone either way, and Angle got the nod. Because of his skill, look, speaking ability on talk shows, and most of all, the gold medal, he was offered a long-term \$250,000 per year deal by the WWF coming out of the Olympics. He had never seen pro wrestling, and having grown up in amateur wrestling, was taught to hate it, and turned down the offer. Two years later, after failing to make it as a TV sportscaster, he came back to WWF, asking for a job. They put him in a camp for one week under Dory Funk Jr., and he was so impressive that he had his first pro match four days after his first session. The company signed him to a contract for far less money, sent him to Memphis, where they had their developmental program. He quickly got the reputation for being a very good technician, and was compared with Jack Brisco in how quickly he picked the game up, but it was thought, believe it or not, that he was suspect on a major league basis because of his interviews. He was brought up in late 1999, as a heel. In the 2000 edition of the Olympic history book, it was written, "Angle briefly became a national hero. In 1998, he horrified wrestling aficionados by signing a contract with the entertainment-oriented World Wrestling Federation." He's already held the WWF championship four times and was widely viewed internally, when he went down after breaking his neck a second time in early 2003 as the top man in the company. Ric Flair even stated that barring injuries, he could be the greatest all-around wrestler in history, and views him as the greatest athlete he's ever come across in pro wrestling. However, Angle himself conceded earlier this year that he may never reach the level of a Flair or a Bret Hart, who he considered as the best wrestlers he's seen, because after a third neck injury this year, he recognizes, at 35, that his career may be on borrowed time.

-Even though he has toned down his style, Angle has already been told by management that he's taking too many bumps at house shows

August 23, 2004

-For probably the past three years, the 2004 elections for the Wrestling Observer looked to be the most interesting in the history of the elections because more unique candidates than in any other election would become eligible. At the time, in 2001, the list was Jun Akiyama, HHH, Kazushi Sakuraba, Great Sasuke and Kiyoshi Tamura. Over the past two years, the name Kurt Angle would have been added. Akiyama had a career filled with incredible matches, but he also worked with some of the best people in history, and was never a success when the spotlight of being the top singles star in his promotion was put on him. Angle is the first man in the history of pro wrestling to be the consensus best legitimate wrestler in the world in his weight division, and later become the consensus best illegitimate wrestler in the world. However, Angle started his career in late 1998, and didn't even come up to the main WWF roster until late 1999. Looking back, I don't think there is any arguing that from 2001-2003, he had three straight Hall of Fame years, as arguably the best wrestler in the business, but longevity was not going for him.. Angle, also 35, joined Bull Nakano in 2001, as the only person to be elected on the slightest of margins, getting 105 of the 175 U.S./Canada votes cast, or 60%. HHH, 35, got 103 votes, finishing two votes shy at 59%. Angle received tremendous support among wrestlers themselves, both active and retired legends. HHH, who had more longevity and has always been positioned as a stronger character than Angle, actually did better among current wrestlers, as well as reporters, than Angle, but not nearly as well among retired legends. Perhaps the sentiment that HHH was given his spot on top based on his look and political allies, and constantly had preferential booking behind him, while Angle really had to overcome bad career management, played the difference in veterans who saw the difference. That was a sentiment expressed. As far as being first ballot inductees, both Angle and HHH were actually hampered, since many people who didn't vote for either specifically had stated on their ballots or in correspondence to me, saying they felt they deserved to be in, but didn't like voting for them while their careers were still in progress and at the top level... There is also the debate on what should count. Kurt Angle is a good enough pro that if he had never won a gold medal, while he probably wouldn't have gotten the break he did at first, his pro career is enough to make him at least a strong candidate. Some believe the gold medal, world title and NCAA title, combined with his pro career make him someone whose credentials are untouchable, and even with his lack of longevity, should be the elusive "first ballot selection," a select group that only includes Liger, Steve Austin, Akira Hokuto, Kenta Kobashi and Manami Toyota. Satoru Sayama had less longevity as something special (April 1981 to August 1983), although he was a revolutionary figure who changed the business, and had a few years prior to that as a superstar in Mexico and England. Probably one of the reasons it was so close is whether that counts... Kurt Angle was poor among historians (17%), and only 58% among reporters, but through the roof among both groups of wrestlers, including 89% among his peers.

On paper, Angle's career reads like a sports and entertainment legend, yet, it's the stuff that isn't on paper that is the most impressive. At the U.S. Nationals in 1996, Angle landed on his head trying to avoid losing points against Jason Loukides. The result was two bulging and herniated discs in his neck that poked into his spinal cord, two cracked vertebrae and four pulled muscles in his neck. He was also behind 3-0 in the match, which in hindsight wasn't important. The injury kept him out all of two minutes. Angle made a comeback and scored a takedown at the buzzer to win, 4-3. Six hours later, in tremendous pain, he wrestled Kerry McCoy, and knew he couldn't take him down, so he tried to outwrestle him standing. The two went to a 0-0 draw, but the decision, since Angle was pushing him more standing, went to Angle, and with it, the national title. When he got examined when he got home, he found out the news. His Olympic dream was over. He needed to rest six months or risk paralysis. He kept going to doctors, trying to find a different opinion, and didn't get it. Finally he found a doctor willing to inject mepivacaine, a strong pain killer, into his neck. He needed shots to train, and to wrestle. As national champion, he was able to avoid the hard tournament that the top eight in the weight class go into, which was loaded with McCoy, Mark Coleman, Mark Kerr and the eventual winner, Dan Chaid. Angle beat Chaid in two straight matches, 7-0 and 3-0, to earn the spot on the U.S. team in the 220 pound weight class. The pain had subsided enough by the time the Olympics came around to where the neck wasn't bothering him enough to be a major hindrance. Fast forward seven years. In constant pain, and needing Valium to sleep, Angle's neck went out again while on an overseas tour, and it looked like he needed major neck surgery and would be out a year. Scheduled to go in the ring for a short match and drop the title, Angle asked Vince McMahon for an audible, and to do the match several weeks later at Wrestlemania on March 30, 2003, at Safeco Field, in the main event slot, before 54,097 fans. In a very controversial decision, McMahon allowed Angle to have his match. Angle was in no condition to be wrestling a match, let alone anchoring the biggest show of the year, with one arm beginning to atrophy from the nerve damage and risking winding up like Paul Orndorff, a star in the 80s who was making so much money in a feud with Hulk Hogan when he suffered neck and nerve damage, and persevered on, and ended up never fully recovering from it. Angle went in the ring, did a long match, and had Lesnar not slipped on his finish, a shooting star press, it would have been a strong match of the year candidate. After the adrenaline wore off, Angle went into shock due to all the damage he did to himself in the match, and was hospitalized, joining Lesnar, who nearly had his own career ending injury when he landed on his head doing what was supposed to be the finish. Angle underwent a new surgical technique, didn't get the fusion that Dr. Lloyd Youngblood suggested, and was actually back in the ring, feeling better than he had in years, in a few months, and performed like he hadn't missed a beat. But in hindsight, those decisions may work against him on the other end. Angle's neck has gone out on him two more times over the past 17 months, and he's conceded that he may never have the longevity in wrestling to be talked about in the same breath as Ric Flair and Bret Hart, who in his mind were the generation's premiere performers. At the age of 35, he's taking things one day at a time, but publicly is hoping for three more years in the ring, and wanting to break into acting as his long-term goal. For being the first man in history to be both the best wrestler in the world in his weight (1995 world champion and 1996 gold medalist at 220 pounds) and later become the best pro wrestler in the world (2001, 2002 and 2003 Most Outstanding Wrestler), the price has been a high one. Angle has gone above and beyond rationality and achieving things few could ever

do, as well as believing injuries and doctors' advice doesn't count. The results are he can no longer hear out of his left ear. He has nerve damage in his face. He's had six knee surgeries, two neck surgeries and certainly has at least one more waiting in his future. Years ago, before the last three neck injuries, his wife publicly said she was worried he would wind up in a wheelchair before he was 40. His wrestling accomplishments are even more impressive when put into perspective. Angle did the opposite of most wrestlers when it came to weight. Most wrestlers in his era, before a lot of stringent reforms were made in amateur wrestling due to a few deaths from dehydration, would cut weight. Someone who walked around at 200-210 pounds would probably in college wrestle at 177 or possibly 190. He refused to cut weight, which cost him a scholarship to Penn State, where he wanted to go, because the wrestling coach thought he was too small to be competitive at heavyweight and he refused to wrestle at 190. His size also cost him in football, because he was a linebacker, but at 5-10, most Division I programs felt he was too small. Even in the Olympics, he weighed in at 211, after eating a big meal, causing his opponents to smile, thinking the defending world champion had come in too small and would be overpowered. In the 220 pound weight class, most of his foes were 240 pounders naturally, who dieted and dehydrated to make weight, and were back around 235-240 by match time. At 199 pounds in 1992, when he defeated 275-pound Sylvester "Predator" Terkay for the NCAA heavyweight title, he was the lightest heavyweight champion anyone can remember. Born December 9, 1968, Angle grew up in Pittsburgh. He was the youngest of five brothers who were all good wrestlers. He was an all-state linebacker as a senior at Mt. Lebanon High and Western Pennsylvania defensive player of the year. He was also both state and national high school champion in 1987 as a heavyweight wrestler. At Clarion University, he was teenage national champion in 1988 in the 220 pound weight class, and placed in the top 12 in the NCAA heavyweight tournament. That same year, he lost 1-0, in a freestyle meet against Dan Severn, who was ranked No. 2 in the country and in the top ten in the world. After red shirting in 1989, he came back to go 87-2-1 in his final three years of college, winning the 1990 and 1992 NCAA titles, and placing second in 1991. He blew out his knee four days before the 1990 NCAA tournament and still won. He blew out the other knee one month before the 1991 tournament. After college, his accomplishments, besides his world title and gold medal performance, included national freestyle championships in 1995 and 1996, winning the Canada Cup, the Henri DeGlane Challenge in France (ironically, DeGlane and Angle are the only two people who have both won an Olympic gold medal in wrestling and also held a major world professional championship), the World Grand Prix in Slovakia, the Krasnoyarsk world tournament in Russia and a world tournament in France. He is only the fourth man in history to win a gold medal, a world championship, an NCAA championship and a high school national championship, joining his coach, Dave Schultz, Kenny Monday and John Smith. He's already been inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame, the Clarion University Athletic Hall of Fame, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Hall of Fame, and in 2001, was inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame. He never saw pro wrestling as a kid, and knew nothing about it when he was offered a \$250,000 per year multi-year deal after the 1996 Olympics by the WWF. He didn't even consider it. He was invited to an ECW show, actually with the idea of doing a double-cross on him where he'd be doing commentary on a Taz match, and Taz would verbally punk him out, when Paul Heyman was trying to market Taz as the real deal, and what better way than to punk out a gold medalist, who had no idea what he was being used for or getting

into. It wasn't a pleasant first look at wrestling, as Angle was offended by Raven using a cross in an angle, and was so hot that Paul Heyman insisted Raven apologize for the angle, which Raven did in the most insincere fashion imaginable, as he didn't want to do so as a heel. Two years later, he went back to WWF, and was offered nothing more than a chance to attend a training camp, since the feeling was the marketability of his gold medal time line had passed. In addition, the company had gotten burned on the Mark Henry deal, so offering big money to someone out of the Olympics wasn't as much of a given, even though Brock Lesnar got big money two years later out of college. He went to training camp under Dory Funk Jr., and a few days later, on August 20, 1998, he had his first pro match in Salem, MA, against Tom Prichard. After his first days in camp, the company already knew it had a winner. He was signed to a contract, and in March of 1999, was sent to Memphis. On July 24, 1999, he defeated J.R. Smooth (Rikishi) to win the Power Pro title, which he held until August 7, 1999, when he lost to Steve Bradley due to interference from Jim Cornette. The early reports on him were mixed. There was no question he had the athletic ability, as his work inside the ring was immediately compared with a young Jack Brisco. It was said he picked up the business faster than anyone who had never been a fan growing up. The problem was, the clean cut babyface wasn't in vogue, so the decision was made for him to go heel. In Memphis, it also appeared he was going to have two other problems. First was his size, as WWF was traditionally the land of the giants, and second, while he was well spoken, he didn't seem a natural on interviews. In fact, they used local manager Brandon Baxter to do most of his talking for him in Memphis. Angle was brought up to the main roster in November, 1999, and was an instant star as a heel, given the gimmick of the only real athlete in the WWF. Fans really didn't know how to take to him immediately, although his character of being arrogant and totally unaware of it led to some early boos, which caught on when he would say, "You don't boo an Olympic gold medalist." Once, when wrestling Val Venis, he would yell at the crowd incredulously about cheering a porn star above an Olympic gold medalist. To put into perspective of just how impressive he's been as a pro wrestler in such a short period of time, in his four full years, he's placed 6th, 3rd, 1st and 2nd in Wrestler of the Year balloting. In the 24 years of the award, only two Americans have compiled as many points during their career, Ric Flair and Hulk Hogan. He's had four WWE titles, one WCW (after the buy-out and before the title was dropped) title, the IC, U.S. and European titles as well as the Smackdown brand tag title with Benoit, and was in the main event closer position on 13 PPV shows. His series of matches with Benoit from 2000-2003, climaxed with a match at the 2003 Royal Rumble, was probably the best U.S. in-ring rivalry since the heyday of Flair vs. Steamboat, and often compared to Jack Brisco vs. Dory Funk Jr. And most likely, nobody in wrestling during that time period has had as many outstanding matches. With the possible exception of Chris Benoit, there has been no more consistent performer in the U.S., to the point where he's had so many great matches in such a short period of time, that they almost cease to stand out. From Wrestlemania 2002 through Wrestlemania 2004 had 16 either singles, three-way or regular tag matches on PPV, and had 11 matches **** or better and the only matches below ****½ were either with Hulk Hogan or Big Show. In 2003, he had three of the top ten Matches of the Year with Benoit (2nd, and tops in North America), Lesnar (7th and 10th) and Feud of the year with Lesnar. In 2002, he scored a double of winning Wrestler of the Year, and Most Outstanding, a feat previously accomplished by only Mitsuharu Misawa and Ric Flair. He also placed an unprecedented 2nd (vs. Edge), 4th (Angle & Benoit vs. Guerreros vs. Rey

Mysterio & Edge) and 6th (vs. Benoit) for Feud of the Year, 3rd (with Benoit) for Tag Team of the Year, Won Best on Interviews, Best Technical Wrestler and won Match of the Year (with Benoit vs. Edge & Mysterio on 10/20 in Little Rock to win as well as a 9th place singles match with Benoit). In 2001, he placed 4th (vs. Steve Austin) and 7th (vs. Benoit) for Feud of the Year, as well as 3rd in Best Technical and 3rd for Best on Interviews. And that's for a career that has generally been mismanaged. Angle was put on the map in as a major name in 2000, with a love triangle feud over Stephanie McMahon, with HHH. HHH was married to Stephanie in storyline form, before their real life wedding. Angle was constantly maneuvering to break them up. The obvious end result is somehow Angle and Stephanie would get together, causing HHH to turn babyface. Somehow, that didn't happen, and the feud petered out. It could have buried a lesser wrestler (Test never recovered from a similar storyline burial), but Angle was so good both in and out of the ring that the writers loved doing comedy material for him, Edge and Christian as the self-absorbed Team Eck. The wrestlers, particularly top guys like Rock and Austin, loved working with him, and since he had the mentality of having a great match every time he was on TV, he worked tons of TV matches that were on the same level as his PPV matches. But he played the comedy figure for too long, and it hindered him in being effective on top. Angle was never able to establish himself as a true drawing card, despite the crowd chanting "You suck" in unison at him in a way where he had the aura live of being a true superstar. His geeky past also made it difficult for him when they've attempted to turn him babyface several times. He was also hurt in 2003 when the company was handed an easy angle in the Lesnar-Angle Wrestlemania follow-up with him as a babyface, and somehow even managed to botch that up. But he is now facing his greatest challenge, having to not only come back after his fourth major neck injury, but also from a General Manager role on television that was the first thing since trying to be a television sportscaster after the Olympics that he wasn't a big success at. Angle is also the one active pro wrestler who probably carries the most respect among old-timers. He was Lou Thesz' favorite wrestler when Thesz passed away, and legends like Bret Hart (who called him the greatest wrestler active today), Ric Flair (who has called him the greatest athlete he's ever seen in the business), Harley Race and Dusty Rhodes have all mentioned him as being the best in wrestling today. Angle won his first WWF title on October 22, 2000, beating Rock, in Albany, less than one year after starting with the company. Rock regained it on February 25, 2001, in Las Vegas, to set up the Rock vs. Austin match at Wrestlemania. His second reign came as a babyface, winning in his home town of Pittsburgh on September, 23, 2001, from Austin, but losing it back to Austin on October 8, 2001, in Indianapolis. He beat Big Show for No. 3 on December 15, 2002, in Fort Lauderdale, to set up his dropping the title to Lesnar at Wrestlemania 2003. His final reign was winning a three-way over Lesnar and Show on July 27, 2003, in Denver. Lesnar regained it in their televised 60:00 Iron Man match on September 16, 2003, in Raleigh, with Lesnar winning five of nine falls. While Angle probably only has a few years left inside the ring, it is believed he'll be with the company for the long haul, either as a coach, agent, announcer, or public relations person. Angle even considered making another run at Olympic gold in 2004. He talked with McMahon about taking a sabbatical at the end of 2002, spurred on by, after being out of amateur wrestling for six years, when he beat Lesnar, giving away 60 pounds, in a dressing room wrestling match in Fargo, ND. According to those who saw the match, while Angle talked of it as a tough match and praised Lesnar, Angle was said to have been clearly dominant. However, one workout at the Olympic training center to see how much

the level of competition had changed in just six years, combined with constant knee and neck problems, caused him to choose against it. He's also been a national spokesperson for angina awareness, a heart disease that has taken the life of many members of his family.

August 25, 2004

The story of the 8/15 SummerSlam show at the Air Canada Center in Toronto was supposed to be Randy Orton winning the World title from Chris Benoit... 5. Kurt Angle beat Eddie Guerrero in 13:38... Apparently Kurt Angle convinced Eddie Guerrero that losing would be better for Guerrero. I was shocked at that one, because Guerrero is fading fast, hasn't scored a major win since Wrestlemania while losing heat, and a potential talked about program with Luther Reigns (who Angle has been pushing for), will just make him another guy. Judging from television, they are at least for now, still keeping the program with Guerrero vs Angle short-term.

August 30, 2004

-Angle is being told, besides to take less bumps, to use the Angle slam and ankle lock less frequently during matches. There is a feeling he is using those moves too often at house shows when they aren't the finish. Again, having not seen the finished product and the preceding product, I don't know, but when changes are made for "safe" moves like the ankle lock that are used less that make a match less exciting (being that Angle isn't going to win at house shows anyway), I think you fall into the category of overanalyzing matches that are getting over to begin with

-Kendall Cross, who was a gold medalist on the 1996 U.S. Olympic wrestling team with Angle, was asked about Angle and amateur wrestling. Cross is the current Executive Director of the Dave Schultz Wrestling Foundation, which raises money for amateur wrestlers to train. He said, "Angle was one of us, and I think he still is. He contributes to the Schultz Foundation and was one of Dave's training partners. I can get him on the phone and pick up where we left off." As noted many times, there are still people in amateur wrestling, although the number is smaller than it was four years ago, who are still mad that Angle took the career path he did

September 27, 2004

-Internally, talent has been frustrated more as business has gone down. Besides the pressure leading to a brief altercation between Kurt Angle and Eddie Guerrero after Smackdown, there is tremendous heat on new Vice President of talent relations, John Laurinaitis... The Angle-Guerrero incident stemmed from the post-match angle on Smackdown in Spokane. In the contract signing angle, the plan was for Angle & Luther Reigns to knock Guerrero out of the ring. At that point, when Show then ripped up the contract for the Guerrero match and signed the Angle match, they both knocked Show down. They were supposed to beat down Show until getting good heat, at which point Guerrero would run in for the save, to set up the tag match. Guerrero ran back in for the save literally seconds after they went after Show, giving them no time to build any heat. After the show, Angle started yelling at Guerrero about it and Guerrero

got really mad. It escalated. The reports we got were that Angle shoved Guerrero. Guerrero then went to attack Angle, but Angle grabbed him in a front facelock (as opposed to choking him in a guillotine), powered him to the ground and basically kept him there, more neutralizing him rather than trying to hurt him. Several wrestlers convinced Angle to let him go. Guerrero flipped out while being neutralized and when Angle let him go, they had to hold Guerrero from going after him again. Even with guys as big as Show and Reigns there on the spot, the feeling was nobody was going to physically break it up as they wouldn't be able to pry Angle off him against Angle's will. Even after they were separated, reportedly both continued yelling at each other as they were taken in different directions. Guerrero went to the locker room and Angle was called in to see Vince, where he reportedly started complaining heavily about Guerrero. Even though there have been signs ever since the Germany tour regarding Guerrero, and while it was never publicly said, that was part of the reason the title was taken off him, most of the locker room is sympathetic toward him because he's so well liked and respected. The company is well aware of Guerrero's issues with depression and has tried to help him out, including Vince McMahon telling him they don't believe the ratings, buy rates and attendance declines were his fault. Guerrero does have a temper, which is something of a family trademark as brothers Chavo and Mando were, in their day, quick to get into fights, usually with people much bigger than they were. Last year there was an incident at a Smackdown taping backstage involving Guerrero and Charlie Haas. As a babyface, he lost his cool when even a few fans heckled him hard at house shows on more than one occasion in recent months. There was also heat between Guerrero and Angle stemming from the 8/17 Smackdown match in Hamilton with Guerrero & Mysterio vs. Angle & Reigns, where Guerrero apparently believed they weren't letting him look strong enough. As noted last week, there were people who knew him who felt he needed to be given some time off, but that he himself would never ask for it. Although it is only in selected markets, it is the Smackdown events in the Hispanic markets, with Guerrero and Rey Mysterio, which are the most successful for the product and why Smackdown greatly outpaced Raw at the box office last month. As has been noted, if you take the Hispanic viewership, the strongest demo by far, away from Smackdown, you've got a 2.0 rated show (that is not taking the viewership away and figuring by a national number, but taking the Hispanic viewership away and also dividing by the non-Hispanic homes). It behooves the product to have an almost unbeatable Hispanic star for that reason. Guerrero's popularity flattened when he lost the title, particularly when people realized he didn't lose it to build to getting revenge on JBL, but that the racist beat the Hispanic idol in their feud when it was time to switch partners. Angle is respected as a wrestler and performer, but in some circles, there has been bitterness built up with him, particularly of late with the feeling that he and Undertaker are working together as the two top guys in the Smackdown brand to protect each other to build for a Wrestlemania showdown. Angle was able to convince management to have Guerrero, the babyface who had just lost his program to JBL, lose clean to the ankle lock at SummerSlam. There was a lot of second guessing that finish being so clean, particularly after Angle got the second win in their 2/3 fall match on television, although that one was due to outside interference. In reality, the company problems are far deeper than who wins and loses these matches and whether or not Guerrero gets pushed, but with business bad, everything is second-guessed and pointed at as far as what are the reasons fans aren't as avid. One company higher-up noted that Angle was the last guy anyone would want to start something with, and probably the last guy to start something with anyone. But the

frustration on all accounts has gotten out of hand. When they had the house show in San Diego last month, there was some fear backstage Angle was going to go after Konnan over a non-wrestling related dispute and possible misunderstanding. Angle has become a lot more of a controversial character to some. For years, Angle was thought to be a great athlete who was naive to the political aspects of wrestling. Unlike most, he could get away with it because management loved him for his ability, and the fans took to him like a major player, so he was locked into a top spot. But he was outmaneuvered at times, and his career could have used better direction, particularly when the business got hot. Understanding that, he's become more aggressive in how he's been used and has spoken up now that he has more knowledge of how things operate, although some have felt Angle's knowledge is still of only a few years, and he overanalyzes the minor problems when it's the big problems that have caused the declines in business. But he's thought of internally as a lifer, in that whenever his career ends, likely due to his bad neck, they'll want to keep him around as either an agent or a trainer, as well as to do P.R. He has studied the business, but still only has six years experience and only with one system. There is the natural frustration of being a headliner while things are good, and seeing them crumble the way they have. With Guerrero, he has many issues facing him, and both are key people in a stressful situation with the business going down and their own fears because both of their bodies are in constant pain and starting to give out after years of being superior athletes.

- Angle did an interview with T.J. Madigan of the Calgary Sun last week where his main complaint was not the problems in the company, but how NBC treated the wrestling coverage in the Olympics. He felt the prime time coverage was geared too heavily toward female viewers, who like gymnastics, and that boxing and wrestling aired past midnight. Angle stayed up to watch Gaber, and said, "Oh, he's awesome. The quicker he can come in, the better it will be. The longer you wait, the less impact he will have. I just hope everybody is smart enough to realize the big match will be between him and me. One Olympic gold medalist against another. If they don't put him on Smackdown, then I don't know what WWE is thinking." Angle also admitted he hated doing the G.M. character this summer. "I didn't like my character and I didn't like doing it. They wanted me to be angry all the time. It was one dimensional, and I have a lot more dimensions than that. I didn't enjoy it, and I was just itching to get back in the ring." He gave the impression he's thinking past his current program with Big Show, saying he's more looking forward to doing programs with Undertaker and Cena. When asked about winning the title back, he said, "I see no reason not to (give me the belt). I consider myself the best wrestler on Smackdown. Karam Gaber, the Egyptian Olympic gold medalist in Greco-Roman wrestling at 211 pounds that we wrote about last month, has not talked with WWE since winning the gold medal. He went back to Egypt where he received a hero's welcome. He is scheduled to come to the U.S. in late October. WWE is planning on sitting down with him and making him an offer at that time. The person who probably wants him in the company more than any other is Angle.

October 4, 2004

-Here is some more background of the Guerrero-Angle situation. Guerrero complained that he thought Angle was disrespecting him in their matches. In particular, he thought Angle was working too stiff with him, and specifically noted Angle slapping him in the head hard a few weeks back when he asked Angle to stay away from his head. Angle did immediately apologize to Guerrero when it was brought up. Angle & Reigns have also had troubles working with him because at times when he's down and selling, and they try to pick him up off the mat, he refuses to let them. The incident itself was blamed on both guys being frustrated and Guerrero's nerves being frayed

-Angle did an interview for The Sun in the U.K., and mentioned HHH, Benoit, Guerrero as the best workers, Edge and Orton as the guys coming on well and Christian and Noble as top workers who don't get the credit. He also said the correct political thing, noting Undertaker and Show, who will be two of his biggest rivals going forward, as impressive big men. "But when it comes down to it, I don't think anybody has as much technique, credibility and charisma as I do—I have the whole package." He said his 2003 Rumble match with Benoit was his favorite match, although he also said it went 40 minutes (actually 19:48). But it was a hell of a match. In fact, people who saw the Benoit DVD all the way through, and you can imagine the quality of the matches on that one, said it was the best match on the entire DVD. He also has changed his feeling about long-term, saying he's going to be around for a long time to come. His answer used to be he was taking it day-to-day and hoping for three more years. He said he's going to work smarter, which he has been doing, and will not take any chair shots to the head (I wish everyone thought that like because mush brains in later life is not a good thing). He talked about toning down the style due to so many neck injuries, as noted he'd never do anything like take a German superplex or do a moonsault off a cage again. He again noted he hated the G.M. role and said if he was asked to do it again, he'd turn it down

October 18, 2004

-Paul Heyman had attempted a month or more back to get a trade made for Kurt Angle to Raw for Benoit. The idea was to get Angle off Smackdown, breaking his political base with Undertaker, and also to start an Angle vs. Michaels program for Wrestlemania, and give Angle all fresh opponents, including, at some point, HHH and Ric Flair.

-Rulon Gardner decided against trying pro wrestling. He told people at the RPW tapings of his decision, saying he was committed to RPW, but wouldn't say anything negative about WWE. **He said Angle was the person who got the ball rolling on the deal.**

-Funniest line of last week was Angle was on the Fox & Friends morning talk show on FNN promoting No Mercy. He was asked if he was going to beat Show. His response was, he wasn't sure, because he wouldn't know until Vince told him the finish the day of the match

November 1, 2004

Angle has been involved in the Smackdown creative on the road, along with Undertaker and the agents

November 8, 2004

In a newspaper interview this past week, Angle, when asked about his future, said, "God willing, I can continue to be in this business another two or three years." That's a lot less positive than what he was saying two months ago, which means, while he'll never say it publicly, he's hurting really bad. Even though part of his change in style has been from office pressure to take fewer bumps and hopefully lengthen his career, and his matches have been good of late, you can see a difference in many ways with this latest comeback

November 15, 2004

On 11/2 in St. Louis, we came a few seconds away from having the Steve Williams-Bart Gunn finish. Quite frankly, and I was actually almost ready to cry watching this, because you could see that if exactly what they didn't want to happen actually did, they'd have created a new star in one night, and had everyone who watched the show intrigued because they'd want to know if it was real or wasn't (it was totally real by the way, but when it comes to business, that's immaterial). I've heard from a few people internally, and there are those who recognized it, but I think most, because they only think within the grain, didn't see it then and even after all the talk, still didn't understand it. It was said the two strongest on the idea of addressing and pushing the situation hard during the show were Paul Heyman and Tazz. It's so frustrating watching a company going down have something controversial and that people were talking about handed to them, and then miss the boat. It was a 42 second shoot with Angle and Tough Enough contestant Daniel Puder. They had the guys train all day to kill their legs, eat a big meal of pasta and milk, to set up a few guys puking (they aired one guy puking on the air, but more than one did). Then they had them in the ring and Angle was browbeating them, saying they weren't Tough Enough and acting all military sergeant in their face. Angle looked like a midget, because he's 5-10 and the smallest Tough Enough guy is Mike the Miz, and he's more than 6-foot, and most were 6-3 and up. It was a weird visual because one of their top stars was looking so small against the giants that were recruited, and I can't believe they even let that happen. But you can see how little these things are being thought through nowadays by what happened next, and really, by so much of what has been happening in the company of late. Angle told Nick Mitchell, "I'll punch your face in. I'll make you dizzy.

I'll knock you out," largely doing the drill sergeant role scripted for him to do, and then pie-faced Mitchell. Angle then told Justice Smith, "I didn't know they could stack crap that high." For Angle (or Brian Gewirtz, if he was the one scripting this) to be stealing a line from Mitchell, that Mitchell had just done on the same show

the week before, wow, was that bad. When he got to Puder, Angle said in a bully tone, both again no doubt doing what he was told, "Oh yeah, you're the UFC guy. You ever fight an Olympic champion?" Puder said, "No, sir." Angle said, "You don't want to because I'll beat your ass. You'd better pray you don't make it, boy." They had all the guys do squat thrusts and were eliminating them as they started gassing. Justice Smith, a favorite because of his size, was the first to gas, as known by those who have followed the contest, but this time the fans saw it for themselves. It came down to Puder, who didn't seem to tire a bit, and Chris Nawrocki. Nawrocki was dying, drenched in sweat. And then they eliminated Puder, which everyone saw was weird and the crowd booed heavily. The story was that John Laurinaitis on the headsets told the ref to get rid of the blond guy, but he meant Nawrocki. The ref kicked out the wrong blond guy. It would have made a funnier story if Laurinaitis was the one in the ring getting orders from Vince, but this will have to do. One person backstage said that more important from a business standpoint than what happened with Angle and Puder in their shoot was the crowd reaction when Puder was eliminated. He said he saw immediately they had a star because of how the crowd took to Puder and how much they are booing over a meaningless squat thrust contest. Others watching pointed to the spot where Puder raised his hand to volunteer to face Angle as when he got over. The live crowd was said to have been furious by Puder's elimination because they thought he was being screwed. There was said to have been a decision by either Vince McMahon or Kevin Dunn to turn down the sound for the television airing to make it less noticeable. It was also said that in the ring when they squared off, they also toned down the audio and the UFC chants in particular were far louder live than they came across on television. Watching the tape, you can sense the spots the audio was turned down, most noticeably after the bogus pinfall. As the crowd noise was way down and even then you could hear loud booing and small "bullshit" chants. Instead of recognizing this as something hot stumbled onto, it appeared to be a fear that a "UFC guy" was getting over in a WWE ring. Puder has never fought in UFC. nor claimed to have, but did use the term "Ultimate Fighter" as the generic term for an MMA fighter. When Angle addressed while he was trying to intimidate everyone, he called him "UFC guy," which led to the loud "UFC" chants during the Match. Others were critical of Laurinaitis calling to eliminate "the blonde guy," because he should have said the name Puder or Nawrocki, and some questioned if he even knew their names even though he was the agent producing that segment. Vince was also on the headsets at the time and he was said to have been mad because the scripted plan of Angle wrestling more than one guy was falling apart. Nawrocki was totally dead, not that it would have made much of a difference since he clearly had never wrestled. It took Angle all of three seconds to get the dead Nawrocki down, who quickly grabbed the ropes. They were reset in the center, Angle got him down immediately, turned him over, including a brief crossface, and pinned him easily in 26 seconds. Nawrocki ended up in the hospital with a broken rib, although I didn't see Angle doing anything deliberately to hurt him, he certainly wasn't going easy

on him and was shooting on basically a defenseless guy who was all blown up, and had zero skill. In Angle's defense, it was what he was told to do for the segment. He then was brow beating everyone and said, "Does anyone else want to wrestle me?" Puder raised his hand while everyone else backed down. My sense was it was at that moment they had something. The crowd was buzzing when they got in the ring. Puder blocked his takedown for a few seconds and the crowd was pretty strong with "UFC" chants. They were believing it was real and unlike Brawl for All, were intrigued by it. Puder, who was coached in wrestling by Danny Chaid, the same Danny Puder, who was coached in wrestling by Danny Chaid, the same Danny Chaid that Kurt Angle beat in the finals of the 1996 Olympic trials for the spot in the 220 pound weight class (and you can imagine the writers pulling their hair out over the potential of playing that into the angle), has trained for years with the AKA team in San Jose, one of the top MMA teams in the world. He was coached in submissions for years by Frank Shamrock. Puder has only had four fights, unbeaten with three knockout wins, but all but one were on very small shows and he's faced no high profile fighters. The book on him is great athletic ability with his fighting strength being his base in wrestling. He had an excellent record in high school as the 2000 Central California champion at 215 pounds, and was a good enough prospect in that sport that he was recruited by the University of Oklahoma, which when it comes to college wrestling, is the big time. Puder had a good record for one year at Menlo College before giving up the sport. He's also strong on submissions, has good cardio and suspect stand-up (although three knockout wins would seem to contradict that; he has done amateur boxing and did not excel at that). Puder was Shamrock's training partner for the Tito Ortiz fight and is the guy Shamrock worked with in his line of training videos. I've heard stories where he's eaten alive, in training, a few low level Pride and UFC fighters, through his being coached by former New Japan wrestler Brian Johnston, who also trains many of the Japanese fighters. Puder's wrestling ability is good enough that in training, he was, within the last year, able to handle easily Shinsuke Nakamura in training when Nakamura trained in San Jose for one of the Alexey Ignashov fights, although training and fights are two different things and his fighting experience is limited. Angle was struggling for the take down, got Puder in a front headlock and leaned on him, but Puder popped his head out to escape. They were struggling with Angle trying hard for a takedown, knowing he was in a real battle, and Puder trying mainly to defend, before going for a Kimura. At the 36 second mark, he had the Kimura locked in. People may say differently, but Angle was toast. He'd have had his shoulder ripped out if Puder had put full pressure on, which he didn't, because he likely figured he'd be out for hurting a star. Puder went on his back in a half guard, but kept the hold on and did make sure Angle couldn't get out of it, and Angle was done. Jimmy Korderas then counted a fast three count on Puder, even though he had one shoulder clearly up (both shoulders did touch at one point, so if you're scoring this by touch fall amateur rules, he was pinned even though he was in full control of Angle with the Kimura, but by pro three second rules, he was

not). It was a panic move by Korderas, and for that matter, the company itself, to save Angle, thinking this was about to be a major embarrassment to pro wrestling. In a sense, given their mind set, they were very lucky. In that position, and with that hold, doing a sweep would be relatively easy (tempered by the fact Angle's balance on top would be nothing Puder was used to dealing with, but Puder was the one in control at that point), and Puder on top for a pin would have made the higher-ups want to shoot themselves with the mentality they had at that moment. Korderas was given the word on his earpiece by Gerald Brisco, an ex-college wrestler at Oklahoma State, who was the first guy on the headsets to recognize immediately when Angle was checkmated, to count to three immediately and get out of this, before most others had any idea something was wrong. Laurinaitis also understood, and one source said was in a visible panic in fear of what Vince's reaction would be to this. What they didn't realize is it would have been the opposite, as they'd have created the biggest wrestling news story in a long time and a controversy that would have been huge. But, it's easy to say that with 20/20 hindsight. Even without that happening, and the tap would have been gigantic, by portraying it as exactly what it was to fans on the TV show in commentary, they still had what would have been the most talked about thing in wrestling in months, because of the same Hart-McMahon furor over who was right, what was and wasn't real, and if it was a brilliant work or something real on TV. In fact, my wife, watching the bogus three count's first reaction was, "Oh my God, this is going to be like that match in Montreal." I didn't even think it would be any big deal because without a somewhat trained eye, the footage on TV was not all that spectacular and the commentary buried what it was. As it turned out, at our local high school, according to my brother-in-law, for the first time since the Rock & Eugene angle, WWE wrestling was a significant topic of conversation at school, as the wrestling team members (one of which was him) were going crazy about what they'd seen on WWE, and all saw it as Puder schooling Angle and the big bad wolves screwing him... Angle, with his ego bruised, was pissed, and refused to shake Puder's hand (although he was playing bad guy and may have done that anyway), and whispered to him this was the entertainment business and it's not about hurting people (ironic since he had just hurt someone who had to be hospitalized and it was questionable at the time if Nawrocki would be able to continue in the competition from his broken rib), and that they were doing a wrestling match. "Don't you know any better? It's not a fucking UFC match, it's an amateur wrestling contest." A lot have used this logic to defend Angle, whose real defense is he should have never been put in that position untrained and injured in the first place. But it doesn't hold up. It was, quite frankly, never specified what it is. Nawrocki got a rope break, which doesn't exist in amateur wrestling. Angle was brutalizing Nawrocki with a quick crossface, threatening to punch out Mitchell, even if in character, and his comment to Puder was "have you ever fought (not wrestled) an Olympic champion." Angle continued, "Stay off your back. Are you "stupid? Are you fucking stupid?. Alright, well, better luck next time and get out of my face." When Korderas was counting three, in the background you can see Charles Robinson indicating to Korderas that Puder had his shoulder up. Apparently, Puder had

already asked one of the two referees if he could do submissions and been told they were okay. Trainers had been bullying and hurting students on "Tough Enough" and at wrestling schools in these situations forever. Prior to a big show in Buffalo, for publicity, he was training with the

University of Buffalo wrestling team with television news cameras covering it. He was goaded into a one-on-one session with their heavyweight, Don Beitleman (who later would become a major pro wrestling star as Don Curtis, and in later life, became one of Thesz' closest friends). Beitleman took Thesz down and put him on his back. Strangler Lewis, who was Thesz' manager, and was virtually blind by that time, couldn't see what happened, but sensed something was very wrong, and the 260-pound man staggered like he mistakenly got in the way of the TV camera. Thesz ended up catching Beitleman in a top wristlock, and Beitleman screamed in pain, ending the match. A shouting match ensued because the college wrestling people, looking at embarrassing the pro champion, screamed the move was illegal. Thesz responded, "Maybe in your rules, but not in mine." While I doubt Thesz did many workouts with college wrestling teams after that, the end result solidified Thesz' standing as the right guy to have the belt, because of how he got out of the jam.

What was interesting is that I don't think anyone live, and 98% of wrestling fans watching, really saw fully what happened, but it all took place in a 42 second period. The crowd live came alive big-time when the two locked up, more because they could see Puder genuinely blocking Angle for a few seconds before going down, but the rest happened so quickly that without either MMA knowledge or announcers commentary explaining it, it was too deep for them, other than the recognition of the fast count and Puder's shoulder getting up before the three.

While Tazz did call the Kimura a keylock, he never acted like Angle was in trouble and when it was over, totally blew Puder off, saying, "Well, so much for UFC," just implying Angle pinned him quick and Puder was no competition. "Well, so much for UFC," was said to have been a line fed to Tazz to say on his headsets, I believe from Vince himself.

However, on the MMA boards, this was huge. In fact, it was probably the biggest topic of discussion of 2004, with more different threads, different takes and more responses to the threads than any topic I've ever seen. Just one of the literally dozens of threads on the sherdog.com site, probably the most popular MMA gossip site, had more than 800 responses and 27,500 views within days, when the biggest MMA stories of the year usually top out at 2-3 threads with 200 responses max on the big one. · Everyone, particularly those who had trained in submissions or had watched a lot of fights, realized that an unknown fighter had embarrassed Angle on Smackdown and had he wanted to, he could have tom his shoulder out, although nobody could figure out why it aired, since it was a taped

show. Without seeing it in context, many thought they were doing a pro wrestling match and suddenly Puder had double-crossed Angle, like the Rikidozan and Masahiko Kimura (whom the Kimura move was named after since he popularized it in his days as a judo world champion). Others didn't care how Puder did it, thinking it was this wet dream of a fake wrestling superstar getting the revenge from the insecure world of real hating popular fakers. Others thought it had to be a brilliant work by McMahon to create a new superstar. Many of them who idolized Angle believed it had to have been a work, because there is no way some "no-name MMA fighter" could stop his takedown. Most who saw it recognized what it was as far as being a shoot, but it got so crazy we had arguments as to whether a shoot under pro wrestling rules would have submissions legal.

After it was over, Angle was furious in the locker room, trying to say it wasn't supposed to be a submission deal. He was also mad at management because he was given no advance notice over what he was supposed to do, so it wasn't as if he'd been training, even for a week, to get ready to do shooting. In addition, the writers (well, writer, as the idea for the segment was said to be largely Brian Gewirtz) who put him in that situation may not have realized Angle's neck was thrashed from an injury two days earlier. Gewirtz, who has no athletic background, would have had no concept about the difference between great pro wrestling shape by a shooter, and being in shape to do a shoot against a real competitor. The way the segment was scripted, Angle was supposed to both stretch (and yes, that means using torture holds) and pin several guys. It was stopped at two, both because everyone else had backed down, and because Angle himself called an audible because he was hurt. After calming down, Angle expressed interest in also turning it into a major angle, but the company wasn't interested.

Everyone at this point was aware of Puder's background, and when this segment was put together, I was told there was a backstage expectation Puder was probably going to win the squat thrust drill to begin with because those who were close to the competition had it well established he was in the best condition of the group. Angle went out there expecting to thrash several people, but that Puder would likely be the one non-pushover, but all he knew was UFC fighter, and was totally unaware of the extent of Puder's wrestling background. Still, even with his injuries, with lead time to get back in shape, a 35-year-old Olympic gold medalist is going to beat a 23-year-old who never even had Division I experience in straight wrestling. There was some curiosity about him and Angle before it ever started. It was believed they'd have a confrontation and everyone would get a laugh out of Angle destroying him. It was also clear because Angle was not in training, that he was blowing up fast in there (and he was legendary for stamina, and has the most stamina of anyone on the roster under the parameters of pro wrestling, but stamina for high level competitive shooting or wrestling is a whole different ball game). Puder was a younger guy, with no serious injuries, who was training daily for fighting before leaving for Tough Enough.

Even if Angle destroyed Puder, as expected, his condition is such that it wasn't worth the injury risk. although Angle, perhaps wanting to prove something, also expressed interest in doing a shoot match of a worked feud. Well, if Puder wins the thing, this will have been the night he won it because he broke out of the pack, as our third week poll had Puder with 57% of the vote to 20% for Mike Mizanin and 9% for Dan Rodimer, a complete turnaround. Rodimer's stock has fallen greatly as nobody internally even mentions his name anymore, but it is said to be a given if Rodimer doesn't win or quit, that he'll get a developmental contract. The feeling is it's also close to, if not a lock, Puder will as well. There were guys backstage who thought it was hilarious, including one major star wrestler who said he thought it was one of the greatest moments ever on Smackdown, which says something, because the natural inclination among wrestlers is to be pissed if an outsider upstages one of them. Others thought it was stupid and irresponsible to put Angle in that position, which I'm guessing is the majority viewpoint with 20/20 hindsight. But the former tells you just how much the feeling has changed with some people on Angle. Many MMA fighters would have tapped before the ref saved Angle just because they knew it was locked, even though 100% full pressure wasn't being applied, although Puder could have done it at will. Angle, in that split second, since it was competitive and his mind in competition is like no other, would have very likely taken the injury rather than tapped, as he wrestled on a broken neck at Mania and in the Olympics. At his age and with his injuries and wanting career longevity, I'd temper saying I'm sure of that, although one person close to the situation said at that moment, "He (Angle) was in the zone, and he wasn't tapping." Angle ended up with a minor shoulder injury and a jammed neck. His neck was bothering him going into this as he was whiplashed pretty bad on the 10/31 house show in Louisville. Because of being hurt, he took no bumps in Cape Girardeau the night before this. His not wrestling in a match on Smackdown was how it was scripted, and that was said to have been laid out before Angle was hurt in Louisville. He didn't miss any house shows, but at the Smackdown shows on 11/6 in Miami and 11/7 in Fort Myers, he was clearly hurt as he worked in three-on-two handicap matches, worked only about 30 seconds both nights, and again took no bumps. After the St. Louis episode aired, when MMA boards started going crazy with the idea a shootfighter really beat Angle on a WWE TV show, the WWE web site pulled the footage, cutting the "Tough Enough" video after Angle destroyed Nawrocki. They did that very late Thursday, and it was only after the internet furor and what they would have considered bad pub, which seems to indicate the company itself didn't understand what it was. To prove the company's reaction to all this, the footage of the Angle vs. Puder match was replaced by these words on their web site, "Angle mauled Nawrocki before taking volunteers, next pinning Daniel Puder in a slightly tougher, but still relatively easy match." Apparently, the reason it aired as is, was few in the company thought anyone would notice anything other than Angle pinning Puder because the ref counted three and Tazz called it like it was a burial, and the crowd sound was turned down enough that the boos weren't so overwhelming. And they were 98% correct. It wasn't until

it became so huge on MMA boards that they saw how people were seeing this, and instead of exploiting it, got scared. It did air on the weekend "Afterburn" show, but that was because that show was put together on Thursday. That show was sent out to stations before the MMA community went so nuts on it and created the controversy, and they wouldn't have been able to pull that footage like they did on the web site. On the WWE's own web site, it also changed the Puder bio in the "Tough Enough" section to eliminate his wrestling and MMA background, and he's simply listed as a college student who owns a print company. Except for the Miz, who has no athletic background, he's the only contestant not listed with having a major sports background. On the "Tough Enough" replay segment on Raw, they went from showing the training session before the show, the pasta eating contest, the barfing, and cut then right to Torrie Wilson teasing the guys about next week, with no hint Angle had ever even been involved in the segment. There were people pushing to do commentary that would have gotten it over as to a worked version of what the shoot was to fans and push it hard as a major angle. The argument was that no angles the company are doing are over, and there was nothing they could do that had the potential to get people talking about Smackdown as this. Without the announcers pushing it, there is no angle. One source claimed Tazz pitched as hard as he could from a position of having no booking power to have the company jump on it and play it up huge in the commentary. Vince and Dunn were adamant about not doing it and not acknowledging anything happened in commentary. No reason was given. One major star close to the situation was confused about the reaction, as Vince, when pressed by those who thought this whole \$1 million "Tough Enough" thing was a dumb idea, had responded that nobody is coming into the business who is that special star who can carry the company, so he thought if he offered a million dollars, he'd find one or two. Then when it worked out better than he could have ever dreamed, because it wasn't his idea, he not only didn't want to pull the trigger, but wanted it covered up. But when it's over, he's still paying out \$1 million, which is about two years worth of the entire developmental budget for OVW and all its contracted talent. One person with experience at tons of booking meetings for a few big companies and was more adamant about the potential of this one, believing with proper follow-up, it could turn into a mainstream news story, said after being in meetings for years, the mentality in almost every bookers meeting is that if it wasn't our idea to begin with, we're not going to let it work. Others closer to the situation claim that wasn't the case. "It wasn't a pride of authorship issue," insisted someone in WWE responding to this point of view. "Vince and Kevin didn't see how potentially huge this was. All they could see was an established star was being hurt by an Unknown." Certainly, WWE, McMahon and Dunn, have become legendary for leaving millions on the table over the past three years with their handling of the Invasion, the entrance of Bill Goldberg, and the potential of an Eric Bischoff vs. Vince McMahon feud, Rob Van Dam as a top babyface, and even the potential of ECW as a cult thing to bring emotion on TV. Another person suggested doing something would compromise the credibility of "Tough Enough," which is Dunn's baby, because doing anything out of this would kill the drama as to who would win, and the million dollar last week

payoff would at that point be a formality. It is said that is also a big issue here, and Vince truly believes Tough Enough needs to be fair and balanced, and any acknowledgment of what happened would be so strong as to clinch the result of the competition six weeks early. I think at this point, they wished, by their taking it off the web site, that they never showed it in the first place, but apparently they didn't truly realize what it was they were showing. The usual wrestling line of thinking was an outsider embarrassed our top shooter so we have to portray it as something different. They didn't realize is the "outsider" was someone they have under contract (all Tough Enough competitors are under contract to the company), so he's an insider (again this where the mentality that screwed the Invasion angle, Goldberg, etc. all comes into play again). They are desperate to create new stars, the audience live got behind the new guy more than any new guy they've pushed in a long time. He can't work yet, but this business has been built forever on guys who can work making those who can't, look like they are world beaters. If Angle truly is the closest modern wrestler to Ric Flair in his prime, and he's never truly been put in a position to be, this would be his chance to prove it, because Flair has done it many times over.

November 22, 2004

-Speaking of Tough Enough, the Angle-Puder thing got even funnier with yet another change on the WWE web site. In the web site wrap up of week three, which we reported last week on Angle having a slightly tougher, but still easier win over Puder, now all references to it even having taken place were eliminated. The new wrap-up reads: "After being put through some physical rigors by Al Snow in the garage before Smackdown!, the seven Tough Enough finalists had a squad thrust competition, with the winner—Chris Nawrocki—getting a match with Kurt Angle." The original booking plan was for Angle to actually tear up and stretch all seven guys. It would have worked if it was just the other six. The only mainstream stuff that has come out on this was in Don Callis' Winnipeg Sun column, where he called it the most interesting thing to happen on a WWE TV show in months. Callis noted Angle was caught in the Kimura, and then the ref made the count even though Puder's shoulder was up. Callis also questioned the company not capitalizing on what it had, saying there was much less potential in the Bart Gunn-Steve Williams thing (which WWE did do a weak angle out of) and said the incident taught two lessons: 1) Don't let top talent shoot on national television, as anything can happen; 2) just because you didn't think of something, that doesn't make it any less of a great angle

-Angle & Reigns were in a rental car accident a few weeks back, but were not injured

November 29, 2004

With his neck and shoulder problems, Angle was limited this weekend at the house shows. In Washington, DC, he didn't even work the show, and just managed Jindrak & Reigns. He did work six-mans in Syracuse and Elmira, but limited what he did

December 6, 2004

When Gerald Brisco was asked over the weekend at the Mid Atlantic convention (and I was told the best Q&A of the weekend was the Brisco Brothers) about the Butterbean-Bart Gunn and Puder-Angle situations, he said, "In the case of Butterbean, we were shocked, but in the case of Angle, not that many people know Kurt had no feeling in his arms that night, had already wrestled, and has the neck of a 65-year-old man, but that's what happens when you take that chance and another star is born." No feeling in his arms? Like he would be put in a shoot situation like that? Please. And another star is born? They did everything to make sure that didn't happen, even at the same time they are wanting it to happen. And while he did wrestle, how can one even compare his 20 second match where he destroyed a guy with all the stuff the other guys had to do to be softened up before Angle came out

January 3, 2005

Angle's current condition is that he's got complete numbness in one of his fingers (I believe the little finger on his left hand) and his weak hand has maybe 50% of the grip strength of his strong hand. I'm guessing the only way he can get it fixed is surgery, and surgery to his neck at this point could end his career

January 10, 2005

Angle appears on MTV's "Made" TV show on 1/13 at 10 p.m. The story is about a high schooler who trains to be a high school wrestler under former Olympic team member Gene Mills. Angle taped an appearance training with the kid in November

January 31, 2005

For Wrestlemania, we're told the decisions have been changed, and it will be Michaels vs. Angle. I think much of the card will become clear at the Royal Rumble

February 21, 2005

There have been suggestions to turn Angle face, because of the feeling he could work a wrestling face style that wouldn't require taking bumps. On the road, they are usually putting him in six-mans (except, like of late, trying to get he and Cena ready for No Way out) and TV he's been protected with the Angle challenge stuff. Although a lot of it was due to Mysterio, the Saitama show did indicate that when he needs to go, he can still go at the top level

March 14, 2005

Angle did an interview with the Ottawa Sun talking about his future. Because he's lost ground in the last year, he's trying to say he's fine and no-sell his injuries. He said he felt Vince McMahon lost confidence in him as a top guy because of his series of neck injuries and surgeries. He

claimed he's healthy now and ready to be back holding the title. He also said his goal is to have a ten-year pro wrestling career, which should eliminate rumors he was thinking of retiring soon. I think everyone should realize that most top wrestlers will not retire unless they are either let go, or physically incapacitated to where there is no choice. Angle is mentally tougher than most wrestlers to begin with, so he's going to go until he drops. As shown in recent months, it appears WWE wants him for the long haul, so they usually put him in the position at house shows where he doesn't have to do much physically, and they've given him the series of short squash matches on TV unless necessary, trying to save him for having to do good matches for just a few key TV main events and PPV matches

March 28, 2005

-When asked again this week in the Edmonton Sun about rumors he would retire, Angle again denied them. "I've given up a lot of time from being with my family so in the long run, my daughter would be better off, but I can't walk away. After three (neck) injuries, I thought it might be time to retire, but I love it too much. I'm going to wrestle as much as I can till the doctors tell me I can't anymore. It's the love of doing it and I can't walk away with the legendary status of Bret Hart or Shawn Michaels after five years." He noted that after Wrestlemania 18, when he went into shock backstage working that great match with Lesnar while having a freshly broken neck and nerve damage, his wife asked him to retire. "It was a scary moment being in the locker room and having the shakes and going to the hospital. Retirement came across my mind, but I never lost sight of the fact I wanted to come back." Angle said he will have physical problems for the rest of his life, even if he retires now, but he doesn't have any problem wrestling right now. If his daughter is his prime motivation, he should consider retiring if this has become a health risk. When his daughter turns 15, I'm willing to bet she'd rather have her dad in less pain and being able to help train her in sports and do things the rest of us take for granted rather than having an extra \$750,000 or so in inheritance because he killed himself for an extra year or two

-Kurt Angle and Danny Hodge, who are already dual Hall of Famers in the National Wrestling Hall of Fame for amateur wrestling and the Observer Hall of Fame, were named on 3/18 as two of the 15 greatest college wrestlers in history as part of the 75th NCAA tournament. A poll of wrestling experts named the 45 greatest college wrestlers in history, and the final all-time team would be voted on by college wrestling fans on-line. While Hodge, along with the likes of Dan Gable, Yojiro Uetake, Carlton Haselrig and Cael Sanderson (whom even Gable, generally considered the greatest, has acknowledged as being the greatest college wrestler ever because of his 159-0 record), were automatic picks, there is little question that Angle's notoriety from being a current pro wrestling superstar put him on the list. By no means was Angle a joke as a choice, but there were others not chosen who had better collegiate records. Angle won two NCAA heavyweight titles, in 1990 and 1992, and placed second, largely due to a knee injury, in 1991. He didn't place as a freshman. While his being picked among the top 15 of all-time is controversial, if you include international competition, he would be considered a strong pick as the greatest 220-pound weight class wrestler the country has ever produced, as well as perhaps the best pound-for-pound heavyweight ever. As an undersized heavyweight, generally giving up anywhere from 20 to 75 pounds per match, he posted a 116-10-2 record from 1989-92 at

Clarion University. Still, Dick Hutton came one overtime loss in a controversial match to Verne Gagne from being not only the first four-time NCAA champion, but the first man to go unbeaten in college wrestling over four seasons, and he didn't make the final team. Hutton was also an NWA world heavyweight champion in pro wrestling, which was the main title belt in wrestling at the time, but he was by no means the pro star Angle was. Kevin Randleman, who was a contemporary of Angle's, also took two NCAA titles and placed second a third time, like Angle, but was out of school and never had a senior year, so his college career and overall record was actually more impressive, at 108-7-3, and still had theoretically his strongest year still left. Jimmy Jackson (1976-78), Earl McCready (1928-30, who also went unbeaten in college) and Mark Schultz (1981-83) were all three-time champions who didn't make the final list, and Schultz also won a gold medal. Still, due to his WWF fame during a boom period and his gold medal, Angle would probably be rivaled only by Verne Gagne (a national star in the first TV era and a legendary figure in the Midwest to this day) as the most famous former NCAA champion on a national basis, even though Gable and Sanderson would be the biggest names of all within the amateur wrestling community. As noted, the strongest point in Angle's favor is he was probably the smallest heavyweight champion in modern times. Angle's regular wrestling weight ranged from 198 to 215 pounds, and generally speaking, people of that size during that era would compete at 190, and some would cut to even 177. Angle refused to cut weight at a time when extreme weight cutting was a regular part of the wrestling scene. The fact he wouldn't cut weight is what cost him a scholarship to Penn State, as he was a national high school champion as a heavyweight, but their coaching staff felt he was too small to compete against the top college heavyweights, and when he made it clear he was competing as a heavyweight, he wasn't offered a scholarship. Jack Brisco, who only lost once in college, but due to outside commitments only wrestled varsity two years at Oklahoma State, was the top star in pro wrestling from 1973-75 as NWA world champion during the alliance's heyday, but it was a more regionalized professional popularity. Perhaps the most famous name nowadays of any top collegiate wrestler may have been Bob Marella, although nobody would know him as that name, but everyone, pretty much in and out of wrestling, has heard of Gorilla Monsoon. The biggest names, without question, when they were still in college were Gable, Sanderson and Chris Taylor (who I'm very surprised didn't make the list), who were all pretty well known sports figures while still in college. Because Angle is the best talker of the group, the 15 men picked, all living, voted Angle as the spokesperson, and he thanked those attending on 3/18 in St. Louis, held outdoors at Union Stations's South Plaza, near the Savvis Center, and watched by 4,000 fans. The ceremony was introduced by St. Louis mayor Francis Slay. It added to the big year for Angle's coach at Clarion University, Bob Bubba, who is not only being inducted into the Hall of Fame later this year, but had two of his proteges make the 15 greatest of all-time, as Wade Schalles, who attended Clarion University from 1971-1974 also made the final 15. Angle compared the honor with winning a second Olympic gold medal, and noted how many of the men standing with him like Gable were his idols growing up. Clarion was one of only four schools (the others being more well-known powerhouses Iowa, Iowa State and Oklahoma State) to have two members make the top 15. Angle was interviewed on ESPN 2 live that day, with Bruce Baumgartner, considered the best heavyweight wrestler ever in the U.S., and noted that even Baumgartner didn't make the top 15. Baumgartner was easily the best U.S. heavyweight in history when you factor in his world championships and Olympic record, but was

not a candidate for top 15, as in college, he won in 1982 (beating Steve Williams in the finals), but lost the finals in both 1980 and 1981. "You look at the guys besides you and I think, 'I don't belong on this list,'" said Angle. "I'm happy when someone comes up to me and says, 'Hey, I remember you when you beat Terkay (Sylvester Terkay in the 1992 NCAA championship match),' or, 'Hey, I remember when you beat the Iranian (Abbas Jadidy) for the gold medal,' how, 'Hey, I remember you when you beat The Rock. "You've got more than 15 gold medalists," he continued. "You've got more than 15 Hall of Famers and I'm one of the best 15 ever...that blows my mind." The truth is, the listing was heavily skewed toward modern wrestlers. The only names who aren't current who made the final 15 were Schalles, who has remained known in the wrestling community as a writer and was famous for being a pinning machine in college; Uetake, who destroyed everyone he faced in being the dominant wrestler from 1964-66 (as a teammate of Brisco); Gable, considered the country's all-time legend; and Hodge, who has in recent years had a popularity revival as he's become the Babe Ruth of college wrestling because the Hodge Trophy is named after him. He's also become a regular at all the NCAA tournaments and still demonstrates squeezing apples with his bare hands while in his early 70s. The complete team was: Stephen Abas (103-2 with three NCAA titles between 1998-2002 at Fresno State and a member of the 2004 Olympic team); Tom Brands (158-7-2 with three NCAA titles from Iowa from 1989-92); Gable (96-1 with 72 pins, and whose loss to Larry Owings, whom he had beaten easily on several occasions, in the final match of his collegiate career in 1970 after the NCAA finals, was his only loss from high school to the Olympics and is probably the most famous college wrestling match in history, wrestled from 1968-70 with two NCAA titles at Iowa State and later became the most successful wrestling coach in history at rival Iowa); John Smith (157-7-2 and two NCAA titles from 1984-88 and a multi-time world champion); Uetake (57-0 with three NCAA titles from 1964-66 at Oklahoma State); Lee Kemp (three NCAA titles at Wisconsin during the 70s); Lincoln McClravy (96-3 with three NCAA titles from Iowa between 1993-97); Schalles (153-5-1 with 106 pins and two NCAA titles, and would have only surely won a third except he was ruled ineligible his senior year to compete, but pinned three different NCAA champions during that year, including the wrestler who won Outstanding Wrestler of all that year in the NCAA tournament); Pat Smith (the first four-time NCAA champion from 1990-94 with a 121-5-2 record at Oklahoma State); Joe Williams (three-time NCAA champ from Iowa who compiled a 129-9 record from 1994-98, a 2004 Olympian and currently featured in the Real Pro Wrestling promotion and has talked of going into worked pro wrestling later); Angle (116-10-2); Ed Banach (three NCAA titles for Iowa from 1980-83 as well as a gold medal and would have become the first four-time champion in history had he not lost to Schultz in the 1982 finals); Haselrig (the only six-time national champion, as he won both the Division II and Division I titles three time each at Pittsburgh-Johnstown with a 143-3-1 record before accomplishing what Brock Lesnar failed to do as he became an all-pro in the NFL even though he never played football in college); Hodge (46-0, 36 pins, three titles, never taken down once); and Sanderson (the only man in history to go four seasons undefeated with four NCAA titles).

-There was an interview with Angle in the Melbourne newspaper this past week, saying he wants to bring his family with him on the post-Mania tour, and talked about how much fun he had on the last tour, because he was unexpectedly cheered wildly against Cena in Honolulu (we were told that was both respect for Angle as well as a feeling among Hawaiians that Cena

wasn't real in his hip hop role) and how much he was cheered in Japan against Mysterio (they had a great match). He said his goal for Mania was to have the greatest match of all-time

April 4, 2005

The other side of Kurt Angle came out over the past few weeks in a series of interviews where he addressed the Daniel Puder situation, including on Live Audio Wrestling and WWE Byte This. Angle said on LAW that it was a subject he's not supposed to talk about, but two years ago, he'd have taken Puder out in 15 seconds. But now he's had problems with his neck, has only 30% strength in his left arm and 50% strength in his right arm. He can't feel his left fingers (wrestlers note that when Angle comes out of the ring for a match, he's always shaking his hand in an apparent attempt to get blood and feeling there). He said he has constant tingling in his right hand and problems from his neck (It was funny him saying all this at the same time as in so many other interviews where he claims he's feeling better, although a recent interview with the Melbourne Herald-Star promoting this week's Australian tour was more ominous, as he said he has severe pain and circulation problems in both arms, he's lost a lot of strength and the little finger in his left hand is completely dead). He said an average 23-year-old had a chance to get in the ring with a veteran Olympic champion who would have embarrassed him in 15 seconds if he wasn't injured, like he did with Brock Lesnar when Lesnar first came up (reports were that Angle did beat Lesnar in their amateur wrestling skirmish backstage in Fargo, ND, a few years back, but embarrassed would be too strong of a word). He said he threw Puder around like a rag doll, but Puder got him in a keylock (actually a Kimura). He said he then took Puder down and pinned him because Puder was "stupid enough to stay on his back." He said he was never going to tap because Puder didn't have the hold on strong enough. He said if he was healthy, Puder could have never gotten it on in the first place. He said that after the incident, Vince asked him if he was okay, and he told Vince that he had asked someone with three neck surgeries to go against a shootfighter. He said two years ago he'd have annihilated him, but he is no longer that unstoppable human being that he used to be and told Vince he went from being inhuman to human. He believes he was once the baddest dude on the planet, but now he has his good days and his bad days, and that day was one of his bad days. When asked if the company acted irresponsibly by putting him in that position considering his injuries, Angle said he doesn't blame Vince or the writers. When the incident happened, while most in the company we talked with thought it was nuts not to capitalize on it, they all thought the idea of putting the talent in unscripted, let alone shoot situations with unknown, was a bad idea. It was pointed out Angle wasn't in training for a shoot and had a lot of injuries, and he was going against someone who had done real competition and was training with top MMA fighters just a month earlier. Angle said it just backfired. Vince asked him to do it and he thought, "Why not? Let's have some fun." He was told that the seven guys would be put through a workout so they would be dead tired and could barely stand. Angle said the guys were in such bad condition that when they had them run the wind sprints, they were all dead in 11 minutes. Then they had an hour rest, were put in an eating contest, and the idea was they'd all be gassed out with their stomachs full and they'd get embarrassed and it was supposed to be a big joke on them. Angle said he wasn't going to hurt anyone (he ended up breaking Chris Nawrocki's ribs), just throw them around and teach them a lesson, but it backfired. He said that when he was wrestling, he didn't get tired for

three hours, and made fun of them for being in bad shape. In reality, nobody on the roster, even the ones who train hard, are anywhere near Olympic wrestling shape, and almost nobody in Olympic wrestling was in Kurt Angle Olympic shape. I'm guessing if most of the current active roster had been put through wind sprints, an eating contest and more wind sprints, they'd have fared no better than the guys Angle was making fun of for not being in good shape. A lot of them probably would have fared worse. He said they were so tired they didn't make them do anything else (actually, after the eating contest, they were back in the parking lot doing wind sprints literally until the moment the music played, and they came into the ring, as the DVD actually showed them sprinting right until their music played when they walked from the parking lot right into the ring). He said when they got in the ring, he had them do the squat thrust deal. The guy who won (and if you recall, that was a botched deal as well, because John Laurinatis told the ref Jimmy Korderas to eliminate "the blond-haired guy," meaning Nawrocki, when he and Puder were left. Since Puder's hair was more blonde than Nawrocki's, Korderas tapped the wrong blonde haired guy, Puder). He said after he pinned Nawrocki, Puder had recovered. He noted that Puder wasn't tired, and noted Puder didn't eat much (apparently Puder tanked the eating contest because he figured something was up) and Angle joked that he cheated. He said he hadn't talked about the subject, but that people have been saying Puder is a tough kid, and Angle said he doesn't think he is. Angle said he's never said this before, but in the match with Nawrocki, when he tried to get Nawrocki in a choke and ran him forward on his back, he landed on his head, and both arms went numb. When he got up after pinning Nawrocki, he was in trouble. The idea was that Angle would pin all seven guys, and at that point, he said he wanted Puder, because he figured he'd be the toughest, next, although Puder volunteered anyway. Angle said he couldn't do anything because his arms were dead and Puder got him in the hold. Angle said he still would have taken him down and out but when he lifted him up, Puder had his back against the ropes, and when Angle relaxed, Puder got the "keylock" on him. Angle said it was a cheap move, but that it worked. Angle said he then rammed Puder to the mat, but Puder had the hold on. Angle said he had his knees in position so Puder couldn't complete the hold. I know from my own limited wrestling that you always think you are doing better than you really are and believe you are in no danger of being caught until it's too late, and perhaps Angle really feels this was the case. If anything, Angle, who was so dominant in his competitive career, would never believe he was in trouble until he was way past being checkmated. Kevin Jackson, another gold medalist who went into MMA and was tapped by Frank Shamrock and Jerry Bohlander, in both cases, Jackson had no idea he was in trouble until it was too late. In the first case, he told people it was a fluke and it could never happen again. In the latter case, even though he was clearly trapped and the ref stopped it, he was complaining long and loud at the event it was a premature stoppage. From watching, Puder got the hold when they were standing, went to his back, and was the one in control of the situation. Experienced submission people have told me that what it appeared, that if he wanted to hurt him, he already controlled him to the point it would have taken little effort. He said he then tilted Puder, and the ref counted Puder pinned. Puder actually got his shoulder up but Gerald Brisco, believing Angle was in trouble. The funny part of the story is Vince was back there and didn't even recognize anything was wrong, but Brisco did, screamed at Korderas to count three and end it no matter what. He said that afterwards, people wrote that he was a crybaby and couldn't handle that Puder made him tap, even though he didn't. Angle, in the ring, instead of shaking Puder's hand, and part of

that would be having to maintain the heel persona, started yelling at him for doing the move and telling him he was stupid for going to his back in an amateur wrestling match, although it was never said to be an amateur wrestling match, and Angle's own words, saying he was going for a choke on Nawrocki, contradict the idea Angle himself thought he was doing an amateur wrestling match. Angle said the way Puder is behaving, it will be a long road for him in WWE. He said if he did say what he thought he's said, he's going to find out very quick that he isn't really tough and that guys in the locker room won't appreciate his behavior. He said Puder, in interviews, should have shown him respect, and noted that people saw the Royal Rumble and believes they did what they did to him to teach him a lesson to not be so arrogant. Well, that makes perfect business sense, doesn't it? Ironically, in the MMA interviews I saw on the subject, Puder downplayed the incident, claiming that Angle was too physically strong for him and pinned him, and never claimed he had Angle beat or brought up rolling his own shoulder or going to his back on purpose. One author, Ron Merrill, even told me that he knew that wasn't the case and couldn't understand why Puder wouldn't tell the truth, but when the political situation of pro wrestling was explained, he understood Puder would have been committing career suicide to say anything but what he said. Even though that was the incident that ultimately won him the contract, as he went from an also-ran in the voting to the overwhelming leader that week, a position he never lost, in interviews, he talked more about winning the stupid deal where Mae Young gave him a lap dance. However, privately, at OVW, when other wrestlers, who all knew the real story anyway, since it's going to be well-known wrestling folklore forever, had asked him if he really had Angle, he did admit it, which may have gotten back to Angle. Those who know the situation in the company seem to think it wasn't anything that was said by Puder that got back to Angle that has him so mad at Puder, nor that he's building up a future angle because people say he really doesn't like him and there are no plans to bring Puder up. With so much time off television, there is no upside to doing so now until he is ready in and out of the ring for it (and I can almost guarantee at \$250,000 a year he'll be brought up way too soon and we've seen the usual percentages of how people brought up too soon fare, with Brock Lesnar, John Cena and to a much lesser extent Rene Dupree as the notable exceptions), but that Angle had a problem with what happened and what has been said by many about it. There is definite resentment of Puder, in the sense he is making so much money and he's not even ready to be ready for the main roster, but there is a realization that, put in the position he was put in against Angle, he also did nothing wrong. Vince McMahon created the rules and the stakes for the contest and you can't fault someone for winning it, although in wrestling, there is that weird mentality that if McMahon gives you a good contract and others think you don't deserve it, somehow you are the one to blame and thus resented for it. The writers scripted a real shoot on television, and when you tell someone to really shoot, you can hardly blame them for doing better than you thought they would at it. Many do think he had luck on his side, and perhaps he did. He also didn't overpower Angle to get the move, but out slicked him, and as great a wrestler as Angle is, even injury free, he could have been out slicked, as strong wrestlers get submitted by people of not nearly the strength (as noted with Jackson, himself a gold medal winning wrestler, and someone with far more training in the submission game than Angle, or Kevin Randleman, who has nine years experience in MMA and still gets submitted, and was every bit the college wrestler Angle was). If we're talking about putting someone on their back and pinning him, as opposed to submissions with pins not counting, a healthy Angle's

claim he could have done it in 15 seconds two years earlier is not an exaggeration, but that's kind of irrelevant to the story, since that isn't what happened. In a sense it appears Puder has "WCW" (you know, outsider, even though he's under contract and being paid by WWE) tattooed on his forehead, at least in Angle's mind, and if it's the company's feeling, and the Rumble certainly suggests it is, it's quite the kiss of death. The way Angle talked about him makes it seem like he's not someone under contract to the company, which, if he was thinking business, he would be praising from a company standpoint. If he's thinking his own business down the line, he should certainly not call someone the company has to much invested in "average," particularly when in the company, aside from Shelton Benjamin and Bobby Lashley, and maybe one or two others (like perhaps Big Show, just due to sheer size, even though he has no training), or Charlie Haas, who wrestled in college many years ago, it's doubtful anyone else is going to be at his level at wrestling. At submissions, he likely has more training than anyone on the roster, although William Regal, in doing the carnival wrestling before he was a pro star, would have more experience in applications in real-life situations. Smart business would be to say, whether true or not, that he's the real deal, which, in fact, Angle did say back in December when "Tough Enough" was still going on and it came down to Puder and Mike Mizanin in the finals. If Angle is asked, point blank, in a shoot, what would have happened with him against Benoit, HHH, Batista, Michaels or Undertaker if it was legit, even though the true answer would be, at least healthy, none would last 20 seconds, would he really make a point to say that publicly? Instead, Angle responded poorly, and worse, like one would for an outsider who embarrassed an insecure profession, when the person was neither an outsider (well, in my book someone under contract to WWE is not an outsider, but obviously in WWE there is the tinge of being an outsider if they didn't develop you, or if they didn't make a conscious effort to push you and decide it is your time to get over), nor was there any embarrassment except in their own minds. Sure, when it comes to Angle's league as a wrestler, saying Puder is average is not an unfair portrayal of his ability at the sport of wrestling, but by those standards, all but maybe three people in WWE would be categorized as being the total shits. And it sure makes WWE look bad when he dominated everyone athletically in a contest that started with 3,000 applicants, because what does it saying about the talent judgement of the company when the guy who was, by far, the best athlete of eight finalists out of 3,000 picked is only average?

April 18, 2005

Michaels was the one who came up with tap out finish at Wrestlemania to Angle. They came to him and said they couldn't come up with a finish (which, actually, is a code way of asking him to volunteer to lose). He then suggested losing to the ankle lock, which not only guarantees a high profile rematch, but that he wins it. He said that Angle at this time needed the win more than he did, and he's said to be comfortable that at this stage of his career, he's like Flair, in that he can lose all the time and it won't take away from how people view him or his legacy. There were aspects of the match that were semi-shoots, but in a friendly way. Basically it was Angle telling Michaels he would do shoot takedowns and ask Michaels to try and block, to make it look real, and when he got him down, to try and escape, with Angle telling Michaels to work as hard as he could legit to get out. Angle felt that Michaels wasn't going to be able to do escapes until he let

him and the time was right, but felt it would be better if Michaels was struggling his hardest and couldn't do it for a few seconds

April 25, 2005

Bobby Heenan went nuts after seeing the Angle-Michaels match live, and has told friends it was the greatest pro wrestling match he ever saw, and you can imagine the gravity of that statement. He said it was better than Dory Funk vs. Jack Brisco in St. Louis (Heenan saw the January 1, 1971, match where they turned thousands away that made it the hot wrestling feud in the country, as well as the November 19, 1971 rematch which both went 60:00) or any Ray Stevens match he saw. He now says that Michaels, and not Stevens (the name he has said for years) or Buddy Rogers (who he thought when the best worker of his childhood) is the greatest worker he's ever seen, noting in particular his sell job in the last minute of the match. If you don't know Heenan, you can't understand the gravity of this statement, but he called up Howard Finkel to get both men's number and called them up after the match to tell them it personally. He did spend half the conversation playing a joke on Angle, pretending to be talking to him only to see if he could get him a job with the company before telling him why he really called

June 6, 2005

The Edmonton Sun did an article on Show that was pretty good, mostly talking about the problems of a guy his size traveling, taking showers, cramped planes (those commuter planes must be the worst, because I get all cramped on them and a guy like that is a giant filled with injuries) and the like. He admitted he eats all day with no thought, and doesn't train. **He said Angle is constantly on him to eat right and train. His excuse for not training is a shoulder injury in November, but it has healed up so he's losing that excuse. Angle has planned a schedule for him to get down from his current 490ish to 420-430. He's also looking at doing comedy on TV with Angle, with the idea of him being a giant comedian and Angle as his straight man**

June 13, 2005

Angle is openly talking about wanting to switch to Raw. In an article in the Peoria Journal, he said, "I've wrestled everybody on Smackdown more than once. I love wrestling the Eddie Guerreros and Rey Mysterios and guys like that. But there are guys on Raw that I haven't wrestled in years or have never wrestled. I would like to make a move and have a chance to be the franchise on Raw." He also did a shoot rip on ECW. "They almost ruined the business as a whole. Fans started to expect everyone and everybody to go through tables and get hung by barbed wire and it just really pulled the business back years and years." He somehow blamed the ECW for creating expectations of fans that led to all the neck surgeries. This is a prime example of someone who didn't live through a period, but later studied a period through videotapes, who didn't get what was going on at the time. The Monday Night Wars, not ECW, is what upped the ante for general wrestling and fans expectations. ECW did up the expectations with a very small group of fans, but it wasn't even on national TV until 1999. Yes, this led to more injuries, but Mick Foley's success and popularity is what led to the extreme changes on

the indie scene where guys who didn't understand a great part of Foley's popularity was that he understood the business and his role and was a brilliant talker, and just thought he became a superstar by doing crazy bumps, even with a crappy body, so a ton of people who never would have thought they could have made it in wrestling got into it, didn't train to look good or even to wrestle or to talk, and thought they'd make it by taking crazy bumps. And what Angle, by not having been around, doesn't understand, is that until WCW until late 1996 and WWE until 1997 were two dying businesses, losing millions and both at times with people in charge scared to death they wouldn't last, because they were caught in the past. The exact same things that resulted in so many injuries were a lot of what turned the popularity around, and helped make the business profitable. Some of it was stuff that Kevin Sullivan copied from ECW, some was stuff that WWF copied from ECW, and some was stuff that each side copied from elsewhere or came up with on their own. Angle noted he will be taking time off in October, as he has the lead role in a WWE movie that will be filming in the fall. Angle noted the movie is a definite and said it's a comedy. From what we're told, it is not a definite, but the working idea is a "buddy comedy" where Angle plays the straight man and Show plays the comedy man

July 4, 2005

Angle will be throwing out the first pitch on the 7/2 Yokohama Bay Stars game at Yokohama Stadium in Japan's Major League. The local promoters were able to put the deal together because Hitoshi Tamura of the Bay Stars favorite wrestler is Angle and he comes up to bat to Angle's theme music. Angle and several of the wrestlers are to be attending the afternoon game before their show is Saitama that evening

July 11, 2005

The Angle throwing out the first pitch at the 7/2 Yokohama Bay Stars baseball game was not celebratory because on 6/29, Hitoshi Tamura, was seriously injured when he wrapped his Porsche around a pole. Tamura, who has 21 home runs this season, had injured his back and was doing rehab exercises. The 7/2 game was to be his first game back after two weeks, so he could meet his idol. The injuries were serious enough that every newspaper in the country had the story on the front page of the sports section. He's out now for the rest of the season. The reason Angle was contacted and there was a WWE presence at the game is because Tamura is a big Angle fan and uses Angle's music when he comes up to bat. The team thought it would make for a cool promotional deal since Tamura's first game back coincided with Angle being in Japan and the day of a home game close enough that Angle could attend

July 18, 2005

Some comments from Angle in the Charleston Post-Courier after the Flair match on 6/28. He said Flair in his prime was the greatest ever. "When you're comparing someone to the best, you're comparing him to Ric Flair. Ric Flair is the best." Angle said Flair has told him that he (Angle) is way better than he ever was, and Angle said he told Flair to quit blowing smoke. Flair

has said many times that Angle's first five years in wrestling were far superior to him in his first five years

August 29, 2005

Angle did a Baltimore Sun interview, saying, "A lot of people in this business claim to be the best, but I truly believe there's nobody better than me. I want to be considered the greatest ever." He said he has more passion for pro wrestling than he had for amateur wrestling. He noted that Vince asked him to retire last year, and Angle told him, "I ain't gonna retire. Let me take a break and heal up and I promise you there won't be any more problems." Angle claims, due to stretching, which he does five times per day, he has no neck problems. A lot of people are very skeptical of that. He said he wants to wind up with an iconic status in wrestling, and you can't do that with a short career, so he's looking at wrestling for ten more years. I hope, for his physical sake, he both can do it, and chooses not to do it

October 17, 2005

There was a long article in the 10/10 Washington Post on Angle. Angle noted that USA Wrestling wasn't happy about him joining WWE, but that he believes he's done a great job of exposing amateur wrestling world wide through WWE. He said he was actually a better football player than a wrestler. He said he was really mad that Pitt backed off on giving him a football scholarship, and that Joe Paterno at Penn State was recruiting him, but backed off because he thought he was too short. "That's where football is going wrong. They don't get the smaller guys with heart. If they did that, they'd get a lot more guys with a lot bigger hearts, like me." Not just football. He was very vocal on Lesnar as an NFL player. "Honestly, I thought Brock would make it. I thought Brock had the ability to be a tremendous football player. I have a lot of respect for Mike Tice, but I think he's a moron for not picking Brock. He is so agile, so quick, so smart. Technique in football is (nothing) compared to technique in wrestling. If Mike Tice had any brains in his head, he'd have signed Brock Lesnar and he'd be starting this year. As far as Brock leaving our company, I have no respect for that. Brock quit on us and I don't have any respect for Brock for doing that." Funny, I could swear Angle for months talking about taking a year off to try out for the 2004 Olympic team in wrestling, and only making the decision against it because he suffered too many injuries in wrestling to make a comeback at near 100%. "People don't understand how hard amateur wrestlers work. Put it this way, if we're ever in a bar and we're having a few drinks, stay away from us, because amateur wrestlers are the baddest dudes on the planet. I've seen 118-pound wrestles beat up pro football players. They're just intense, mean sons of (guns). Any pro football (player) will tell you that. Amateur wrestlers are tough bastards. It's because of their training. They're animals. If you're an amateur wrestler, you're stupid enough to abuse your body. The training is not training. It's complete and utter abuse. You train until you're exhausted and ready to fall on your face, and that's when the training begins." He also noted he'd love to wrestle Ray Lewis at Wrestlemania this year. A few years back, Lewis was scheduled at one point to face HHH at a Wrestlemania, and was actually in town to shoot the Raw angle, and then disappeared, backing out on the deal

November 28, 2005

Wrestling, as we know it, has changed.

A TRANSCRIPT OF THE SHORT MEETING VINCE MCMAHON HAD WITH THE WWE WRESTLERS BEFORE THE 11/21 TV TAPINGS IN SHEFFIELD, ENGLAND

McMahon: *The reason for the meeting is there is no good time for anything is my philosophy, so just go do it. But before anything started leaking out and you started hearing rumors and things of that nature, I wanted you to hear it straight from me. First, we're instituting a new drug policy, and we're doing it over the next several weeks. I'd be happy to hear any suggestions that any of you guys may have in terms of that. We'll be testing for drugs of abuse, and abuse of prescription drugs. Even though you have a prescription, if you're abusing that prescription, action will be taken. Performance enhancing drugs as well, steroids, etc., so it will be a very strict policy, one, that quite frankly, I, nor the office, will have anything to do with. We're handing it out completely to an independent drug testing agency, again, which will be announced over the next several weeks, and that's the name of that tune. So before you guys heard it on the street or wherever it is, this would be for all individuals who are under full-time contracts in WWE. Questions and comments? There must be a million of `em going through your head at the moment. I don't have all the answers yet. Again, I'm just in the process sometimes of looking into these things, and, what you have, word gets out. We have been looking into it and I just didn't want word to get out. I wanted you to hear from me first. Again, I don't have the actual policy with me and won't for several weeks. But during that period of time, if you guys have any input whatsoever, you know, I'd love to hear it cuz it's going to be your policy, and one that everybody across the board adheres to.*

First question comes from Kurt Angle: *If you are taking a prescription, and you're tested for that, obviously they're going to be able to gauge if it's a lot, a little?*

McMahon: There's no question. You'll know on the screen the doctor will get back. He would know what prescriptions you're taking and what time you're taking and whether or not you're abusing, and that's real easy to find out.

Angle: *Uh, okay...*

December 19, 2005

In the strange p.r. move of the week, Dave Hawk, the former bodybuilder who handles press for Angle, sent the Pro Wrestling Torch a release from Angle where he claimed he was fine with the exception of a few bumps and bruises, his health was good, and that he would never endanger his health and thanked people for their concern. That was in response to an item written that a huge star was on "Deathwatch," and I guess Angle writing confirmed he believed they were writing about him, thus removing all mystery I guess. "Deathwatch" is an awfully strong term

because that constitutes immediate fears of death and even after Guerrero passed away, nobody ever talked with me about people they fear will die immediately, and pretty much a lot of the roster would have to have a degree of concern between the combination of pain pills and performance enhancing drugs with the plethora of enlarged heart deaths. Where Angle is worse is he's got family history going against him, as heart disease runs in his family

January 9, 2006

There is at least dialogue regarding the idea of a K-1 invasion angle, believe it or not. Of course, it wouldn't be called that, but maybe promoted as the idea of shootfighters coming after wrestlers. Angle is said to be a proponent of it, but they are trying to convince Vince & Stephanie. I'd say unlikely since Vince has never understood how to make the "outsider" concept work on his television, and blown many big money angles that were a lot easier to make work than this. The K-1 team (then again, I thought Akebono was a longshot at last year's Mania even though they negotiated for months on it), would be Bob Sapp, Sam Greco, Predator and Tom Howard

January 23, 2006

Angle was initially unhappy about the decision to make Edge champion. He had been pushing to get the title, believing he was the best person for the position. When the call was to go from Cena to Edge as a swerve, he was feeling bypassed because he'd gotten himself more over than anyone on the Raw brand. As happens with someone else's bad luck, Batista ended up getting hurt that night and they had a world title spot open for Angle

January 30, 2006

-Just after winning the world title, the health of Kurt Angle is once again in question as what is believed to be significant neck damage has led to Angle's hand going numb. Angle has continued to wrestle, although he was heavily protected, doing short tag team matches on his second and third night in Mexico this week when word got out about the damage. Angle went into the 1/19 WWE debut in Mexico City in great pain according to a few sources. The decision was made to put him in short matches in Guadalajara and Monterrey where partners Rey Mysterio and Chris Benoit carried the load. The expectation over the weekend was that Angle would be going for another MRI this week to try and determine the problem, but with Angle's history of neck problems, the concern, in at least some parts of the company, was high. Many have questioned how, with his back and neck injuries and pain not a secret, that there wasn't more concern addressed to Angle's health in recent weeks, if not longer. But when Angle got back from Mexico, he claimed he was okay, and may not even be getting checked out. Angle was given Batista's spot as champion on Smackdown when Batista went down with a torn triceps, shortly after going down with a torn lat. Angle was switched over full-time after the 1/16 Raw, due to a lack of depth on the Smackdown roster, and scheduled to be in a headline role on at least the next three PPV shows. If he has to take time off, the company would have some major decisions to make. In 2003, Angle's career was in jeopardy before Wrestlemania with

what may have been a similar neck injury. He was scheduled to drop the title to Brock Lesnar on TV, similar to how Batista was supposed to lose first to Eddie Guerrero, who passed away before the show, and then the next week to Randy Orton. Like Angle, Batista told management he would work his way through the injury. In Batista's case it was because the Smackdown brand was short-handed on top, and also because they agreed to let him keep the title. With Angle, a scheduled title loss to Lesnar on TV was changed when Angle asked to stay a few more weeks, because he wanted a shot at being in the Wrestlemania main event if his career was going to end. He and Lesnar worked a match that came one botched shooting star press finish away from probably being considered an all-time classic, where he dropped the title clean, and he went into shock in the dressing room after the match because of the beating he took. He had a relatively new minimally invasive surgical technique to repair the neck, that other surgeons who treated wrestlers felt wouldn't hold up to Angle's pounding in the ring. This allowed him to return in a few months, free of pain, as opposed to taking one year plus off like Steve Austin, Lita, Chris Benoit, Bob Holly, Edge and others were forced to take after having neck fusion surgery. When he returned, there were hopes this new technique would be state of the art for wrestlers, but it turned out not to be the hoped for panacea. After a few months, after taking a chair shot to the top of the head, he needed another surgery. His neck worsened once again and at first he was expected to get a third surgery, but instead they did a TV injury angle and he sat out several months playing the role of Smackdown General Manager, rather than undergoing a third surgery. Angle's neck injuries date back to the U.S. national freestyle wrestling championships in 1996, where he herniated two discs and cracked two vertebrae when he fell badly on his head in his semifinal match with Jason Loukides. Down 3-0 after the throw that caused the injury, Angle actually returned to the match, tied things up and hit a takedown at the buzzer to win, 4-3. He came back the next day to beat Kerry McCoy via decision and win the championship, and later won the U.S. Olympic team trials. Ten weeks later, loaded up on mepivacaine painkiller injections in his neck to where he was feeling no pain, but having done almost no training in the interim, he beat Dan Chaid 7-0 and 3-0 in a best of three series to make the team, and followed that by winning the gold medal. Unfortunately, having been told by one doctor after another after the original injury that there was no way he could be ready by the Olympics, let alone the trials, and then succeeding, caused him to not so much deny pain, but deny the consequences of it.

-Angle and wife Karen have gotten back together

April 3, 2006

John Laurinaitis was apparently very upset about an interview Daniel Puder did for the Knight-Ridder chain of newspapers, where he said he made a mistake in not putting full pressure on the Kimura in the Angle deal. Puder said he didn't put full pressure on because he didn't want to hurt one of the company's top stars. As it was, Angle was trapped and panicked. WWE officials ordered the ref to make a fast count even though Puder got his shoulder up, which was funny because ref Charles Robinson was motioning to the ref who counted that his shoulder was up, not realizing the order came from backstage to get Angle out of the jam. "They would have had to push me right there because people would have said, 'What happened?' he

said about had he gone all out in the move. "The crowd would have gone crazy because something like that has never happened before." The general feeling is that Angle would not have tapped because of the belief it would have made pro wrestling and himself look bad, and would have suffered a serious shoulder injury in the process.

April 19, 2006

Kurt Angle has several issues, including his chronic neck problems, which worsened in the past month or so, as well as his wife expecting, and him being something of a business workaholic. Learning from what happened with Eddy Guerrero, they are going to be giving him several house show tours off, although he will probably work TV every week during his sort of a break.

May 1, 2006

The original idea was to keep Angle on TV while he would rest up, but it was changed. They did the injury angle at the Smackdown in London as an explanation. The plan now is after the European tour ends on 4/26, he'll return to TV on either 5/9 or 5/16. All the planned Angle vs. Orton vs. Mysterio title three-ways are now Mysterio vs. JBL vs. Henry. He'll likely have a decreased house show schedule once he comes back. Legitimately, Angle's neck and spine are inflamed and he still lacks feeling in one of his hands. He'll be doing a minimal amount of house shows even after his return, but would be on the TV the last week most likely to build for a return at the PPV, probably with the injury situation, against Henry. Given their prior bouts, he probably should stay hurt two weeks longer and avoid that one. That means Booker beats him via forfeit in the King of the Ring tourney, and pretty well assures Booker vs. Lashley in the finals

June 5, 2006

WWE made the official announcement of bringing ECW back as a third brand on 5/26, before the Smackdown episode where Paul Heyman was in Teddy Long's office and mentioned that ECW was coming back, and they showed during a walk to the ring Heyman speaking with Kurt Angle. It was anything but a dramatic revival.. The first announcement was Heyman would get one draft choice each from Raw and Smackdown, which ended up being Rob Van Dam, as everyone knew, and Kurt Angle, which was a surprise. There will be more additions from the existing roster that haven't been fully determined, under the storyline that if anyone wants to leave for ECW they will be allowed to. The choice of Angle is interesting. While Smackdown seems and is depleted with the recent short-term losses of JBL due to injury and Chris Benoit due to a number of reasons, it will also be bolstered in the next few weeks with the returns of Batista and Randy Orton, the two men who had been groomed for the past year to carry the brand. Angle's move to Smackdown was as an emergency replacement for Batista. On first thought, putting Angle on ECW is a smart move. He's got credibility of being a major star for seven years. The company needs ratings fast because they are only on a trial run with Sci-Fi. Whether the brand makes it or flops will not be determined by what ECW was, but what this version can be, and it has been very clear that Rob Van Dam isn't going to be enough to carry the brand, and people like Terry Funk and Mick Foley won't be there after One Night Stand.

Angle was said to have been very unhappy at the 5/23 tapings in Bakersfield, and this may have been part of the reason. Upon more thinking, this is probably the worst move possible for Angle. Angle's body has broken down badly. ECW is being pushed as a more violent promotion, and even though Paul Heyman called it a new direction of ECW (falling in line with Vince McMahon's thinking that ECW was just crappy hardcore wrestling, not acknowledging ECW gave Eddy Guerrero, Chris Benoit, Dean Malenko and Rey Misterio Jr. their first non-Spanish major pushes in North America when WWF and WCW dismissed them all as being too small to ever make it outside of Japan and Mexico). Even if Angle is pushed as the wrestler in the group, and kept away from the dangerous stunts, he will be performing three nights per week at house shows before a far more demanding fan base, and generally speaking, working with sloppier wrestlers and those willing to take more risks. On the fourth night, he will be on Smackdown television, and fans there will also be expecting something different than what they had seen already on the show because of the ECW moniker. In short, whatever limited time his career may have had will be shortened, probably greatly, if this move isn't rescinded within a few months and he's put back to where he can take more care of himself and has performers to work with less likely to mess up. In addition, and I don't know exactly how his pay deal works, but one would suspect you aren't going to earn nearly the same money main eventing before 1,000 fans per night as you would before 3,000. Plus, unless the ECW wrestlers are part of the Raw/Smackdown PPVs, Angle went from five PPV payoffs for the rest of this year in a key position on every card, to perhaps four, if he's booked strongly for SummerSlam and Survivor Series. For him, taking one for the team is a lose-lose. The financial aspect wouldn't be such a big deal if the physical situation wasn't such a big deal.

June 12, 2006

-The move of Angle to ECW last week showed two things. The first is, the company isn't confident that the old ECW can carry things, and the reality is, this project was never going to succeed in 2006 based on the old ECW. The second is, it showed a commitment by the company for this to succeed. Vince McMahon doesn't like failure anyway, and the company has put a lot of publicity out on this... Even though ECW is billed as more violent and in general, has sloppier and less talented wrestlers, at least starting out, the working idea is this will benefit Angle. He is supposed to be doing a new style where he'll play the old Taz role as the badass shooter. Taz really never took many bumps and the idea is Angle would wrestle more, but work a lower impact style match. Time will tell regarding what type of audience this new ECW draws at the house shows, and whether putting a new guy, even though he's more talented than the original, and marketing him the same way as a successful character in the past, will work. Granted, the expectation is most of the audience for the new ECW would not have even seen much of the old ECW.

-Angle added torn rib cartilage, a very painful injury, to his list of physical woes this past week. He only skipped an OVW commitment and will be working through it.

July 10, 2006

Angle is taking at least a month off. The public reason is that he's injured and has asked for time off, but the actual reason is the company made the call and basically felt it had no choice but to act. The one month off is the timetable of his company ordered suspension (30 days, starting on 6/28, but this is WWE and even that can be altered like Orton coming back a week before his number of days on the suspension ran out because they had a PPV they wanted him on and needed to get an angle shot). But at this point that is just a minimum. This probably explains him doing clean jobs last week because the company was aware they were going to take him off the road to take care of physical and emotional issues. Many have remarked things don't look good for him right now. An example of the fact the 30 days is a minimum is that ECW has house show line-ups booked through the end of August and have no scheduled plans at this point for Angle on them. There is definite concern for Angle, because when the company listed its biggest stars under contract, the names listed were HHH, Cena, Batista, Michaels, Flair, Undertaker, Mystério, Booker, Show and Kane. The company currently has 460 office employees and 165 wrestlers under contract.

August 3, 2006

Kurt Angle returns on the 8/1 ECW show at the Hammerstein Ballroom in New York.

August 21, 2006

Angle is working on a bad groin muscle. He had pulled it before being suspended. At the 8/13 house show in White Plains, he did the spot where he runs up the ropes and does a belly-to-belly superplex, but slipped. He continued the match but had to be helped out. He reaggravated the injury, worked a five second match the next night, but was pulled from his scheduled ladder match on the 8/15 TV show. There is a noticeable difference in Angle's dressing room respect level. On the ECW shows, he's always going to Dean Malenko with ideas to change things, not just for himself, but others. A year ago, he did the same stuff but since he was Kurt Angle, nobody ever complained openly about it. Now, there are people who talk openly and negatively about it to where he was told to at least not be so obvious in front of the talent for his own political good.

August 23, 2006

While Angle within the company, as expected, tried to deny how bad his groin injury (possibly a tear) is, according to a friend, it's pretty bad. The feeling was with his competitive nature, and the injury, they had to pull him from the ladder match (three-way with RVD and Sabu for a title shot at Show, which Sabu was always going over in) for his own good. The TV storyline was something of a shoot as he did want to do the match. Angle's physical problems are exacerbated by out of the ring problems. He's going through a divorce with wife Karen, after they've split up and gotten back together over the past few years. Making it worse is she is pregnant with his first son, and he's got the young daughter who has to be about 3 1/2 or so right now. Angle is insisting to everyone that he is not physically breaking down and wants to get

back in the ring to prove it. At press time, nobody knew how bad the groin injury was or how long he'd be out.

August 28, 2006

Angle was being examined regarding the extent of his groin injury on 8/21. He was kept out of the ECW house show that day even though Altoona is near Pittsburgh, where he lives. He also wasn't in Wilkes-Barre for the taping the next night and there was talk internally of a new injury being discovered. The Angle situation in ECW has gotten worse since our last report.

People have gone to Vince and John Laurinaitis trying to get Angle off ECW, after Angle supposedly said he doesn't want to be in ECW unless he gets a main event championship level push. I don't know how accurate it all is. There's smoke there for sure, but it could be overblown backstage, but it's been talked about now more and more. Angle's biggest issues appear to be outside of wrestling anyway. Much of his family relies on him both for economical and emotional support, and his wife, pregnant with his son, just left him again. That'll throw a lot of people for a loop, but combine that with his athletic drive and his body breaking down, and his denial of it, and you've got a recipe there for some big issues

September 4, 2006

In a move that took many by surprise, but in truth, seemed an inevitability, the wrestling career of Kurt Angle, at least as it pertains to World Wrestling Entertainment, may be over. Angle, 37, was fired on 8/25 over a series of issues, from fears he was destroying himself, to erratic behavior. While many will simplify this and say it was over problems with pain killers, or issues with management, the story is far more complex than that, and the decision was hardly spur of the moment. At times considered almost the company's prized employee, Angle's drive to be the best went beyond all realms of what many would consider sanity. This dates back to high school, if not earlier. In 1987, after winning the state high school wrestling tournament, he went to the teenage nationals, a grueling two-day tournament where he would have to win 11 matches against the best teenagers in the country. After winning seven, in match No. 8, he tore three ligaments in his ankle, but held on to win. He then won his next three matches to claim his first national championship. Still, even after winning as a heavyweight (and in a freestyle match coming within one point of beating Dan Severn, who was ten years older and one of the best wrestlers in the world at the time). and being all-state in football, most of the major wrestling and football programs in the country didn't offer him a scholarship, feeling he was too small for a college heavyweight and he refused to listen to everyone who told him to cut down to 191 or 177, and questioned his size when it came to playing fullback. He went to the NCAA tournament as a freshman, but failed to place. As a sophomore in 1990, he was 30-0-1 and ranked first in the nation going into the NCAA tournament. A week before the tournament, his grandmother died, and the next day, probably because his mind was elsewhere, he tore knee cartilage and sprained his MCL. Every doctor he went to told him there was no way he could wrestle for at least six weeks. He didn't listen, and won five more matches and his first NCAA championship. As a junior, he won his first 33 matches, before an overtime loss ended a streak of 68 matches without a loss. He was so devastated he didn't leave his room for three days, and

the first day he came back, he tore his MCL and PCL in his good knee, and was told he was out for the rest of the season. For the next few weeks, he couldn't even train, but he went into the conference tournament to qualify for the NCAA's, won that, and wound up, wrestling on one leg, going all the way to the finals before losing, 6-4. As a senior, in 1992, he went into the NCAA tournament at 199 pounds, roughly what most of the guys in the 177 pound weight class really weigh. He faced Sylvester Terkay in the finals, giving lip 76 pounds, and beat him 3-1 on a takedown with 18 seconds left in the match. He won his first world championship in 1995. He was a machine, not a human being, when training for the Olympics, did a routine that went far beyond what any expert would call overtraining. He trained eight or nine hours a day. No matter what he was doing to recover from this overtraining, the effect on the deterioration of his joints, his back, and his knees for later in life had to be enormous. The denial of pain, or masking of it, to do that kind of a routine is almost mind-boggling. His leg day included a two-and-a-half minute run up a hill, with added weight resistance,"followed by wind sprints with his training partner on his back. Then came a six-mile run for endurance. Only then came the squat workout. At his peak of his strength and conditioning, he did a routine starting with 149 reps at 135, 73 reps at 225, 44 reps at 315 and 28 reps at 405. Somehow, it worked for him, as he was the best conditioned 210 pounder in the world, consistently beating the best of the 240 pounders who dehydrated themselves to make 220 pounds. During the 1996 national championships, in a semifinal match against Jason Loukides, he landed on his head on a throw, suffering two bulged and herniated discs in his neck, two cracked vertebrae and four pulled muscles. Six hours later, he beat Kerry McCoy in overtime to win the national championship. When he got home, there was no question, the Olympics were done. Perhaps his career was done. When he insisted on wrestling at the Olympic trials, ten weeks later, he was told he was risking paralysis. He loaded himself up by injecting mepivacaine in his neck, to kill the pain. As national champion, he had to win three of three matches against the winner of a loaded tournament, Dan Chaid, who won a tournament that included people like McCoy, Mark Coleman and Mark Kerr. He shot himself up before the first match with Chaid, and felt no pain whatsoever in his neck, winning the match, 7-0, and then won a second match, 3-0. Ten weeks later; he won the gold medal in the Atlanta Olympics. Virtually every competitor he faced outweighed him by 20 or 30 pounds. And as hard as wrestlers at the international level train, through use of pain killers, he was able to train hard enough to be probably the best conditioned wrestler in the tournament. The point of recounting history, particularly the part that everyone knows, that Angle won a gold medal with a broken neck is that it points out things about his character and his life. First, many athletes at the top level are obsessive. It is that personality trait that allows them to do all the things, whether it be live an unbalanced singular focused life, and train past the level when even other driven people would quit. Angle had all that, and two more qualities, that are both good and bad. He denied injuries. It dated back to the junior nationals, if not before. Doctors were wrong. Friends were wrong. Coaches were wrong. Recruiters were wrong. All logic was wrong. Even himself, when he felt the pain that said it's time to drop out and rest, he was also wrong. The only thing that was right was that he had to win, and somehow, when the chips were down, he always did. In the end, it always seemed worth the cost. The bad ankle and bad knees got better, but the national, world and Olympic championships are in the record book forever. Only

a few men in history have won junior nationals, the NCAA's, the worlds and Olympic gold. None did so while being consistently outweighed in almost every match in every one of those tournaments. Both pain and pain medication have been a fact of life for Angle, long before he was in pro wrestling. When he first started wrestling, his wife, Karen, noted that she thought some day he would be in a wheelchair, because he'd never stop. At the time, it was like, jeez, a wheelchair, isn't that being dramatic. For all the crazy demands wrestlers put on their body, the only top names who ended up in a wheelchair were Hayahusa, and that was due to one bad fall on his head, Darren Drosdov, from a similar freak accident, and the Dynamite Kid, who abused his body constantly both in and out of the ring. Clearly, she knew something nobody else did about the injuries he already had, and the mentality he also had that was even more dangerous. In 2003, just before Wrestlemania, Angle started getting numbness in his left hand, and lost a great deal of strength, from two herniated discs that put pressure on his spinal cord. He admitted publicly to needing Valium just to sleep. He was booked to lose the title to Brock Lesnar in a match where he would do nothing, and then take a year off for neck fusion surgery. Instead, against the wishes of every doctor who saw him, he asked Vince McMahon if he could do the main event at Wrestlemania, and worked the match like he was 100% healthy, and when the match was over, backstage, went into shock. Considering his injuries, he put on something well beyond either an incredible, or a sane performance. Against the advice of all other doctors, he didn't get his neck fused, but instead opted for a new minimally invasive surgery that got him back into the ring within a few months. But that just led to more and more injuries, and more and more pain. Through all of this insanity, he had become the only man who ever walked the Earth to earn the title of the greatest amateur wrestler in the world in his weight class and was the consensus pick among his peers in 2002 and 2003 as the single greatest wrestler in the world. Some who have blinders on regarding only one way is the right way may argue that he was never that good of a pro, but if you talk to people like The Rock, Ric Flair, Steve Austin, and right no down the list of the most experienced guys in the company, and the guys he was in the ring with during those years, to the agents and the front office, most privately rated him as being the best performer in the business (publicly you weren't supposed to say that, although many did anyway). But that wasn't good enough." He wanted to be considered the all-time best, and that meant longevity. Plus, the hardest thing for any athlete to go through is retirement. In very few cases do people retire willingly. Retirements in sports are in 95% of the cases, public relations moves. The team makes the decision that you are done, either due to injuries or you just can't cut it at the top level, and you go public and put on a happy face. That's for a normal driven athletes. No matter how severe his long list of injuries were, which included loss of hearing in one ear and nerve damage in his face, and what he was doing to cope with them, somehow, in the ring, he was still one of the top performers in the company. Until recent months, he was still routinely having good-to-great matches

whenever he was put on television and given time. But the injuries and his mentality may not have been his biggest problem. There is a chicken-and-egg question here. Oflate; Angle has become a complete mess. His wife, who is a few months pregnant with a son, left him, taking his daughter, who is three. Did he go over the edge, and cause his wife to finally leave him for a second time. Or did she leave him, sending him over the edge?

And there is a lot more to that than meets the eye. One of his best friends in the company noted that unlike most people who are in their late 30s, Angle has never had to deal with failure. He'd had to deal with heartache and tragedies, but never personal failure. His life has been a series of being told that he couldn't do something, and always doing it. He dealt with deaths of loved ones and it only made him physically stronger. He dealt with injuries. Somehow, they only made him mentally tougher. His marriage, from the start, had not been smooth-sailing, and the pressure of the wrestling business and being on the road never makes things easier. While he and his wife broke up before, at that time he had his other outlet, his work, and they did get back together. For the first time, in his marriage, he was dealing with failing at something he really wanted, at a time when his body, which carried him to all his triumphs, was falling apart in ways that were getting harder to mask and perhaps impossible to fix. Plus, he had the pressure of being the "go-to" guy in his family, the one who was successful, and made a great living, as his \$1 million downside guarantee made him the company's fourth highest paid performer after Undertaker, HHH and John Cena (even with Big Show, although Shawn Michaels would not have surpassed him). If family members needed money, or were between jobs, there was always Kurt.

As bad as wrestling with all the injuries was, it was more stressful when he came home from tours. There was a word that one person after another gave me after Angle was fired. The word was "unavoidable." Like a sports star when he announces his retirement, the story that the decision for the release was Angle's was a way for him to publicly save face. But it was not the truth. As far as within wrestling, while his issues with pain killers date back to 1996, if not earlier, others have traced huge problems back to around this year's Wrestlemania. "There has been a drastic personality change in him over the past few months," noted one friend. After losing the Smackdown title at Wrestlemania in a three-way, he was constantly trying to push to get the title back. His move to ECW was sold on him because he could do the shooter gimmick, which many believe he should have done for years, Paul Heyman knew how to book it from the Tazz days, and it would protect his body at least somewhat. He wasn't scheduled on the Vengeance PPV after beating Randy Orton on ECW television. He convinced Brian Gewirtz to get him on the show, and he was scheduled to win the match. However, when he failed a drug test (ironically, not for pain killers, or he'd have been put into rehab instead of suspended for 30 days, as whatever he was using, he had valid prescriptions for except the drug he was popped for, and that failure was only because his prescription had run out and Dr. David Black, who headed the drug program, flagged him for the violation), they had him do two jobs before starting his suspension. Ironically, today, with the recent policy change when it comes to test failures, he'd have simply kept wrestling and just been docked pay. He got a stern warning from Vince McMahon, at which point everything started unraveling. He was said to be exactly like

Brian Pillman of 1996-97, constantly calling, e-mailing, and text messaging people, from Vince to Kevin Dunn to John Laurinatis and several of the wrestlers and others he's close with, one person saying he estimated 15 or 20 times a day, half the time the messages made no sense, while other times he was completely clear-headed. When he was suspended, there was a significant feeling that he needed help and shouldn't be brought back. However, with ECW so lacking in depth, when the 30 days were up, he was brought immediately back. Privately, many were strongly against that decision. When he came back, much of the ECW locker room turned on him because he became impossible. When he accidentally dropped Rob Van Dam on his head, in the back, he allegedly told an agent it was Van Dam's fault, and the word got around. He was seemingly furious he wasn't booked on SummerSlam. He was constantly lobbying with everyone with power to get on the show. The effort worked, as Vince made the decision to put him on the show, changing the planned Big Show vs. Sabu ECW title match to a four-way, which would have included Van Dam and Angle. The scheduled ladder match on 8/15 was booked first for Big Show to take the contract, only to find out by doing so, all three would be challengers. Then it was changed to where Sabu would win the ladder match, and SummerSlam would be a three-way. The scenario planned was for Angle to show up before the Show vs. Sabu match, and challenge the winner, and end up being added to the match. Angle was pushing hard to get the title in that match. Angle's self destruction in the locker room was becoming impossible to hide, and several wrestlers went to the office about it. There was yet another incident with Van Dam based on something that Angle said in the ring. But somehow, Angle was always able to perform in the ring. He suffered the groin injury on 8/13 in White Plains. He came to television two days later, and wanted to work, denying the severity of the injury. Vince told him that he was hurt, and that he was being pulled from SummerSlam, and they did the angle where Paul Heyman pulled him from the ladder match, and he later got in a backstage confrontation vignette with Heyman, Big Show and the helmeted Bashams. On 8/21, the day before the taping in Wilkes-Barre, PA, he called Laurinaitis and told him that his legs were numb and he was being wheeled through the airport, and claimed his sports massage therapist told him he had torn an abdominal muscle. That was said to be the real eye opener for Vince, who ordered Laurinaitis to set up an MRI for him, and that is apparently also when the decision was made to fire him. A meeting was scheduled for 8/25 at Titan Towers with McMahon, Laurinaitis, Angle, and his personal manager, former pro bodybuilder Dave Hawk. They discussed how to handle the situation and the company paid Angle a sum of money and released him from the rest of his contract. Under usual circumstances, the company would pay a wrestler being cut 90 days worth of salary, which in Angle's case would be \$250,000. That would also serve as the term of a non-compete period. It is not clear whether this situation is exactly like this or not. Angle then told the Associated Press that he had made the decision to step away from pro wrestling for now, but made it clear he is not considering this a retirement. He claimed to have suffered not only the groin injury in the White Plains match, but also a hamstring injury and the torn abdominal muscle. On the WWE web site, Angle categorized it as his decision to leave (the web site itself

categorized it as a mutual decision) because he no longer wanted to use pain medication to continue to perform and needed time off. The story left the obvious question because WWE is a company with a history of sending many people, both wrestlers and employees, to rehab, for either pain killer or recreational drug issues, as opposed to firing them. They have, at least with Tammy Sytch and Jeff Hardy many years ago, fired wrestlers who were told to go to rehab to save their job and refused. Davey Boy Smith was once sent to rehab, but left early because his marriage was falling apart, and was not only brought back, but given a major push anyway (this was during the period Martha Hart had sued the company over Owen's death and it appeared they were bending over backwards to keep Smith happy), but he simply couldn't be pushed and after the case was settled, he was fired. And of all the people who the company has sent to rehab, none were as high profile as Angle, who one would think the company would be only more receptive to taking care of. The firing can only be explained by the enormity of the situation. "The Kurt thing was unavoidable," said another person close to the situation. "To me, the best case scenario is that he seeks help and is successful with treatment, then retires. He's in too much pain to ever be at the level he was, and that will eat him up if he tries to come back." "WWE would certainly welcome Kurt back with open arms," said Vince McMahon on the company web site. "I think Kurt has some issues he has to face, as we all do from time-to-time. We all have our demons, and as human beings, it is important for us to overcome them and become better human beings, athletes and business people." Still, at some point Angle will need to work, and he'd likely be able to make more money in the industry than anywhere else. All Japan, Pro Wrestling NOAH and TNA all expressed immediate interest in Angle when the news got out, none of which is the best for him right now, but such is the nature of the business when one is a marketable name. TNA has jumped on signing nearly every wrestler WWE has dropped over drug issues, and Angle is a tons bigger name than any of them. Exactly how the non-compete was worded is unknown, but it is believed that by the time he heals from the current injuries, he could work Japan or MMA if he so chooses. WWE is strongly concerned that an MMA group, whether it be UFC or a Japanese group, will offer Angle huge money to compete, feeling this would be the worst thing possible for him, figuring there is a natural big money match if promoted right away with Brock Lesnar. Hopefully this won't be considered by Angle, but with so many big money players trying to get into MMA, and needing a hook, it's hard to believe even if UFC has no interest, one of the new start-up groups with big money backing will. All Japan wants him as soon as possible, as they have some momentum coming off the Hiroshi Hase retirement show. NOAH has expressed interest in using him only for big shows, such as Budokan Hall events or a potential 2007 Tokyo Dome show. Whether they could afford what he'd likely want is a big question.

September 11, 2006

There's one more thing I want to note from the Angle story in the last issue. Whether this is the best thing for him long-term health or not, I can recall Keiji Muto and Ken ta Kobashi both being considered done, due to knee problems many years ago. Muto eased up and only really put out on big shows, but after he was considered done as a top performer in the ring, he came back in

2001 to put on some of the best matches of his life, and he was a couple of years older than Angle is now at that time. Kobashi was considered done due to knee problems, had operation after operation and was out for more than one year, and came back to win three Wrestler of the Year awards. Shawn Michaels was out four years and was considered done by all his doctors, and when he came back, it was only expected to be a few more matches and that was it, and now is a full-time performer, and he outworked 90% of the roster in his comeback until a year ago, where, likely due to injuries and age catching up with him, he took more shortcuts. But he's still a viable and valuable main event performer. The point being, people who are both driven and as talented to be the best in their profession, have historically been able to come back to the top when physically it appeared that would be impossible. If Angle takes a long time off and can get the rest of his life in order, maybe the pain will be such that he'll be like Shane Douglas and acknowledge that he simply can't take bumps anymore without pain medication and at that point, the right move is to not take bumps. But you can't count him out, even if the sane reaction seems to be to hope he doesn't wrestle again

September 18, 2006

With his body breaking down, and pain killer issues now public after being fired on 8/25 by World Wrestling Entertainment, Kurt Angle finds himself in a unique situation. He is now the single most in demand individual, perhaps in the history of the industry. He now has the ability to, at least on a short-term basis, make more money than he ever has before, and perhaps, in the process, destroy his body even farther. While few will publicly say so, virtually every major promotion from Ring of Honor to several groups in Japan to UFC and numerous other MMA groups, and everyone in between have expressed everything from curiosity to extreme interest in using Angle as soon as he heals up from his current batch of injuries. Nobody has said so publicly. Privately, everyone, and I mean everyone you can think of, is trying to contact him and talking about ideas on how he could be used. While he can write his ticket in pro wrestling, from the ability to work a light schedule for big money in Japan or TNA, it is in MMA where he has the ability to get a one-day payday that could very conceivably approach his annual \$1 million salary from working in WWE. In almost every way, the tale is sad. Exactly what Angle has left in the tank is in question. But it doesn't matter. Because of his status as both an Olympic gold medalist in wrestling, and the most famous American Olympic gold medalist of all-time due to his stardom in WWE and so many new groups throwing around big money to capitalize on the UFC-fueled MMA boom, he's a marketing dream opportunity in a world of start-ups banking on gold at the end of a rainbow that seems logically to consist of deluded business opportunities. But as anyone who has followed the story closely, it's also a potential nightmare waiting to happen. It would be unfair to say that nobody cares, but does anyone care enough to not use him because not using him would probably be the best thing for him? Well, with the stakes as high as they are and his marketing potential, No, they don't care that much. With Hero's and Pride both invading the United States, and new start-up groups like Calvin Ayre's Bodog Fight, The World Fighting Alliance, WAMA (the Bob Meyrowitz group which we haven't heard a thing about after his original talks of starting up a fight group based around using legends akin to a seniors tennis or golf tour), and The World Fighter, whether Angle is a well-rounded fighter is

immaterial. Quite frankly to all of those groups, whether he is in any kind of physical shape to fight may not even be a big concern to a group looking for that very difficult break. Angle is a big name that would give any group signing him some form of immediate credibility. It's a star power business and with the possible exception of Chuck Liddell, he's a bigger star than anyone in MMA, and is certainly more well known than Liddell or any MMA star in North America. He's also a bigger star than Brock Lesnar. Does that mean if he signs to fight with a smaller group that they will immediately do big numbers based on curiosity? I don't see it. None of those groups have the television exposure to take advantage of the possible freak show curiosity factor-except UFC. Two things that we can confirm at press time. One is that Angle himself started the ball rolling regarding MMA. Whether he was serious or just testing out the waters is unknown, but a lot more will likely be known within the next two weeks. The other is, no matter how non-committal Dana White was on 9/3 on Wrestling Observer Live when asked about Angle or Lesnar (his response on the show was that both would probably be big drawing cards, but he doesn't know what kind of skill level they have, which is certainly a fair appraisal of the current ability of both as well as the marketability of both), he is working hard toward bringing Angle to UFC. Because of earning a percentage of PPV, it is conceivable that both Liddell and Tito Ortiz for their next fight can earn as much in one fight as the highest paid WWE wrestler, HHH, can in one year, and far more than Angle does. While it's doubtful even Angle could delude himself into thinking he could be a top ranked fighter, given his physical condition and age, Ken Shamrock is hardly a top ranked fighter, is older, and will end up making ridiculous money for his PPV match with Ortiz. Angle is far more famous than Shamrock, and unlike most of the big stars in MMA today, he understands how to sell a fight, do good sound bytes, and cut a promo before a live audience. Can he draw for UFC as a one-time curiosity? That's a compelling question with no certain answer until after it happens. Certainly WWE believes an Angle vs. Brock Lesnar match in a UFC octagon would be gigantic, and with UFC scheduling 12 PPV events in 2007, like WWE, they are going to need a unique attraction at some point to keep the shows from blending together. More, would that match-up, or Angle lead more pro wrestling fans into at least checking out a UFC PPV? While the U.S. and Japan are different, history there seems to give a definitive answer. Angle vs. Daniel Puder (who was contacted this past week by someone either representing Angle or trying to put the specific match together) has a back story, which is totally unknown except to the most ardent MMA and pro wrestling fans. But presented correctly on television is a hell of a compelling story, particularly because it can, if told correctly, inspire fervent debates (as were the case when it happened) on exactly what happened, what it proved, and who was "right." It may garner curiosity interest for a grudge match of sorts, even though Puder has no real name today, telling the story makes the match and the story makes him a name. Plus, it's a fight of unknowns where the outcome would be hotly debated, because in reality, nobody would have a clue how it would go. Based on athletic pedigree, Angle would be a gigantic favorite, but he's older and his body is broken down and it is a game Puder has far more experience in. Logically, Angle should lose, but Angle has a competitive drive of insane proportions, and competition toughness under pressure. Even as a shell of himself, he will be the better wrestler, although logic would not favor him. But in reality, while comparing Puder with Renato Sobral as a fighter is ridiculous, to the general public, both are the same, basic unknowns. UFC seemingly succeeded in making Sobral into somebody with a few weeks of TV commercials and a last week hard sell. Boxing and wrestling have for

years marketed unknowns and made them attractions with just a few weeks of promotion by accentuating their positives and knowing their weaknesses, and hiding them. Angle vs. Lesnar, in particular, is a match UFC may sign if available (and right now it isn't because Lesnar is under contract for his first fight with Hero's, and has a ridiculous offer on the table for a second fight with Bodog), if only because of the big picture. Another major promoter is trying to put together Angle vs. Bob Sapp, but I can't see any chance of that, and it would be impossible in the U.S. because of the weight differential. If UFC didn't want to touch it, there would be several other companies clamoring for it, and if someone gets television and that match, it is possible they will be put in the real game. Right now in the U.S., UFC and WWE are the game. Everyone else is spending lots of money and making lots of noise that almost nobody hears. But when you get away from the internet world that really means next to nothing in the big picture, nobody knows they exist. I don't believe any company can make back its expenses in putting that fight together, but many companies will overspend early on marquee stars in a branding effort, and it is a ticket to get into the game, and perhaps, open doors to the real prize, real weekly television exposure and there is nothing aside from signing Mike Tyson that can more greatly make their brand. For UFC, it is in the company's best interest not to allow competitors to be able to open that door, because the entire business changes at that moment. Even if they would want to be purists on this issue, or consider the health of the athlete (but every fighter with any kind of longevity, just like every pro wrestler with any longevity, is hurting in some form anyway). For UFC, because they pay on a percentage, they aren't going to take any major losses if the public doesn't get curious enough to buy and if their fan base turns up its noses at the idea, even though the opposite is more likely. Will the normal fan base spend \$40 for a show where a famous pro wrestler is half of what would likely be a double main event (if they are smart because you do want to at least give the impression you have the top fighters in a co-feature even if they aren't the ones who will draw)? Uncharted waters. Over the long haul, the answer is no, but as a one-time novelty, there is a good chance. Lots of novelties are great ideas, and where they get screwed up is not realizing they are novelties and trying to recreate them after they have been seen. While it will never happen, Tyson in UFC today, even as washed up as he is, would do a million buys for sure if he were to fight Ortiz, or even Angle or Lesnar with the idea of Tyson under MMA rules, particularly as a first-time novelty. I don't see Angle in MMA as anything more than a novelty, a big one-time draw out of curiosity, and if he looks impressive, maybe there is a second one. But he and a promotion may make a good amount of money on the first show. He is not Brock Lesnar, who is younger and healthier and has a shot with good coaching and being brought along correctly of being a legitimate fighter, as he's got the wrestling base and is the best all-around athlete of anyone of his size ever in the sport. He's bigger in match one, but after that, although the jury is certainly out, Lesnar would appear to have the potential to have more long-term value. Angle is at best going to be another Ken Shamrock. But when this year is over, or at least until December 29th the reality is that Shamrock and Ortiz is going to have been the biggest money match ever in MMA, and in many years in pro wrestling. Saying it's a bad idea for business is foolish. While there will be the predictable complaints about using pro wrestlers is comprising the integrity, but the bottom line is everyone knows UFC is real. Nobody is going to think maybe UFC is fake because they use a pro wrestler, just as using a pro wrestler in Pride doesn't make anyone think Pride is fake (ironically, even though at times, at least years ago, maybe they should have). But using Angle, and it doesn't matter who, is risking problems.

And MMA is easier on the body than WWE. But think about this when you think about how Vince McMahon thinks. While I'm sure they never considered Angle vs. Puder because WWE was handed that one and didn't want to touch it and because they never understood the potential of that story and were afraid of it, the company is fully aware of Angle vs. Lesnar "for real" as a potential huge match. But they wanted Angle gone so badly that instead of suspending him, they willingly handed the keys to that match to a group that is kicking their asses bad on PPV. And whether Dana White was going to go for it or not, WWE, as a fact, thought from their perspective he would be stupid as a promoter not to. And they still fired Angle. It has been hinted, but unconfirmed that they wanted him to go to rehab and he refused. It is known that Angle did volunteer to attend a pain management clinic. Angle is currently not in rehab, and has done some negotiations over the past week, as well as written a public letter regarding his situation. He's also been pitching ideas for Wrestlemania to WWE and wrote a letter that seemed to be begging Vince to bring him back. But-after being amicable publicly regarding Angle being fired, WWE fired a shot at him on 9/1, sending out a message on its mobile alert stating that the meeting the week before between Angle and WWE executives was "heated and confrontational," and labeled Angle as an "emotional wreck" when he left the building. Usually WWE mobile alerts are for news that a few hours later will be posted on the web site. Apparently, after that about face, which nobody has explained, the company did another about face, as they never posted anything like that on their site. One company source explained the surprising message as a company response because Angle had done a wire service story earlier in the week. Exactly whether Angle has come to grips with his issues is a big question. Wrestlers in WWE who worked with Angle of late have advised friends with power in other companies, who are thinking of how they can best utilize Angle to grow their business, not to touch him. Exactly what the terms of his release were are unclear: Not confirmed, but from a source very close the top man in the company stated Angle's non-compete was until February, which means WWE will pay him until then. That was avoid any chance of him working for TNA, which another source close to Angle said Angle has no interest in doing because he feels doing that would be an affront to McMahon, who considers TNA his competition. Whether the non-compete would cover MMA is uncertain, but fact is, with his injuries and training needed, if he would fight, it wouldn't be until after February anyway. Hopefully he won't fight, but big money makes people do a lot of things. Angle himself wrote a long message to fans and even Vince McMahon. It was rambling, and at times scary, although it was clear that he is not considering the retirement that would be the best thing for him. Angle said from the day he started in WWF, his goal was to be the best wrestler in the business. "Many say I am, some may say I'm not. But I want you to know with over six solid years of non-stop wrestling action under my belt from all the shows to the world tours, I treated every single match as if it were my last. I've never known a time in my life from training, competition or entertainment that I have not tried to give you over 100% I honestly do not know of any other way to wrestle or perform, and I have always wanted to give you, the fans, what I would expect to see." Angle said he believed he has yet to reach his peak as a pro wrestler, and mentioned the all-time greats, listing Ric Flair, Bret Hart, Shawn Michaels and Undertaker, and said, "But there is one big difference between us. I am by far the most aggressive and intense athlete of all on the mat. When I step into the ring, I treat it as real, it feels real and then I play it like a real shoot fight." He noted that in the past four years he broke his neck twice and had two neck operations, fractured his ribs,

hip, tailbone, fingers and toes, and "tearing almost every major muscle at least one time or another." "Injuries have always been a natural part of the business and my life, but where I have failed is not taking the time to recover. When I'm out, the mental stress, sitting back, becomes worse than the physical pain. Something tells my inner soul to go back regardless of the condition. The funny thing is, this obsession is what the industry loves, but this obsession can also be my destruction." He talked about the pain being so bad he would have to take a Motrin just to get up and take out the garbage. He praised his wife, who he said told him a few weeks ago that if he kept going like this, "Something bad is really going to happen and I don't want Kyra (his daughter) and Kody (his unborn son) to grow up without their father." He then noted after that speech, a few days later, he went back on the road, and pulled his groin, tore his abdominal muscle and blew out a hamstring in his last match, on 8/13 in White Plains. Two days later, they had to order him not to do a ladder match and pull him from SummerSlam.

September 20, 2006

-11/18 may prove to be a noteworthy day because of UFC and HBO boxing going head-to-head on PPV... There was actually talk, because UFC needed a big marquee attraction of perhaps a Kurt Angle debut on that night, but Angle's injury situation, most likely his non-compete, and simply the training he'll need makes that one impossible. Regarding Angle, a potential winner of an idea is to have him be a wrestling coach and give him a lot of face time on Ultimate Fighter building up to his debut, because his name value would be big for ratings. But if his problems are bad enough to get WWE to fire him, that would probably indicate with cameras constantly on him they may wind up doing "Smashing Machine II," (the documentary on Mark Kerr's battles with drug addictions which included him being hospitalized for an overdose), and I don't think that's what they want out of the season. Basically, Angle needs to help Angle. Unfortunately, either fighting or wrestling, the venues he can make money off his name in, are the two worst places to be if you've got painkiller issues, plus the age and physical damage issues. There are people who have gone into fighting at Lesnar's age (29) that have done well (Randy Couture was 34, but he was still wrestling at the world-class level when he made the switch, as opposed to being 37 and ten years off). Nobody Angle's age, nor with the wear-and-tear Angle's body has, has ever pulled this off. Long-term, this is not the place for him. UFC doesn't pay that much for coaches, and they have to spend six weeks in Vegas filming the show, but they do it because it's been great for everyone's career who has done it thus far, and there's a payoff on the PPV as you become a bigger star and draw. The idea of a heavyweight show with Angle and Lesnar both (which can't happen, I'm just talking about ultimate marketing ideas) in the cast but not fighting until the PPV would be a great attraction, but again, there are a lot of negatives that come into play. White has gone the "attraction" route many times, failing with Tank Abbott (although if he had weekly TV building up his comeback it could have been different financially, although not different in the ring) and Sean Gannon (who was a short-term internet hero with zero mainstream name recognition and shouldn't be mentioned in the same breath as a gimmick idea as Angle) and succeeding greatly as far as growing the company with Royce Gracie and Ken Shamrock.

-WWE: Regarding Kurt Angle, and this is not confirmed, but the belief is that he will be paid through late February, so that's when his non-compete ends. Again, we don't know if that is only pro wrestling related when it comes to the non-compete, or would include MMA, but I would presume it includes both

September 25, 2006

-Here's this week's pro wrestling update regarding Angle. We're told he has no interest at all in TNA. He's talking about returning for Mania and there are people in the company also talking about that as well. I can't say people are talking like it's a given, but as a probable. He is being paid until 2/25 so basically he still has \$500,000 coming after he was fired, and that doesn't include royalty payments which will probably be significant for the first year after being gone. He's back with his wife, who said she was tired of him coming home from road trips a mess. Well, now he's not doing road trips, which in most cases is going to help a marriage. Being back with his wife has helped his mental outlook. He's not going to rehab but is going to a doctor who is working with him in pain management. Obviously WWE doesn't want him doing MMA, particularly high profile because him losing could hurt his marketability. It's hard to say if he does something in Japan and loses it would hurt his marketability, because Ken Shamrock was knocked out with one punch by Kazushi Sakuraba and then set every business record in the world for UFC, and you'd think a loss in Pride would hurt you more in UFC than WWE. Besides all the other offers in other sections, Angle has a bonafide offer to work on of the big New Year's Eve events in Japan and is said to be strongly looking at it.

-Dana White is working on finalizing a Kurt Angle vs. Daniel Puder match. As the story goes, both sides say they are up for the match, which stems from a bizarre incident on a taped Smackdown show in St. Louis in late 2004 where in an unscripted situation (which guaranteed will never happen again involving WWE talent unless it's women in an unscripted water balloon match, I don't even think WWE would even do dodgeball with women again), Puder got a Kimura on Angle, and the ref counted three fast even though Puder got his shoulder up. The thing became a huge deal in MMA for about a month, particularly since WWE, not realizing what would happen, put it up on its web site, and then realized the reaction, and took it down. As noted before, the planned finish to the Angle challenge when first put together on Smackdown was to build for Puder, but a combination of the promotion souring on him and a booking change (Puder's only backer in WWE seemed to be Paul Heyman, who was removed as Smackdown head writer in the middle of that storyline) and it was never followed up on. Puder's name got involved in this actually from people working with Angle and looking to promote Angle in an MMA match where he would have a storyline but wouldn't have to go in with an experienced high-level MMA star. If Angle decides to go through with it, and WWE will be very heavily persuading him it's a bad idea, Puder would have to agree because it's a Rocky I type of opportunity for him to make a name. But Vince McMahon and Jim Ross can be exceedingly persuasive people (and they wouldn't be the only ones trying to talk him out of it). For obvious reasons, they wouldn't want this to happen, because if he lost, it would hurt his marketability in wrestling, and ultimately everyone knows some day he's going to be back in wrestling for the long haul. For that reason, in the end, I don't see him fighting anyone he isn't

sure he can beat. This is actually the second time Angle looked to do something in this genre. Several years back, when he was far more healthy, Vince McMahon and Lennox Lewis had serious talks regarding Lewis vs. Brock Lesnar (when Lesnar was being groomed to be the WWE's biggest star) in a shoot. Rules discussions were made and it got far enough that McMahon called Marc Ratner at the Nevada State Athletic Commission for approval and was going to hold it in Las Vegas. The commission was willing to approve it under the conditions it would not be a WWE wrestling show, and that worked pro wrestling matches and shoot matches couldn't appear on the same bill. Angle vs. Michael Moorer (at the time a heavyweight boxing contender) was the proposed semifinal and Angle was gung-ho for the bout. The bout fell through when Lewis pulled out, as apparently he was smartened up on the history of shoot boxer vs. wrestler matches. Lewis later denied it publicly, just saying his discussions were regarding being a special referee for a WWE

-OTHER MMA: For the Bodog Fight promotion, there is a lot going on behind-the-scenes regarding Don Frye, Kurt Angle and Brock Lesnar... The Bodog people are trying to ink either Angle or Lesnar, to give Frye the impression he's replaceable and him come to an easier deal. Bodog, several weeks back, as reported here, made a big money offer to Lesnar. Their original pitch was \$350,000 months back for one fight, but Lesnar's people didn't even return the phone call for several weeks. They are still interested in him and have floated a bigger figure in trying to entice him. Angle was offered \$500,000 to fight Gracie, through the person he's put in charge of his MMA dealings. Angle's people turned it down, saying they were looking for a long-term deal as opposed to a one-fight deal. One of the people working with Bodog suggested using Angle as the coach of the U.S. team against the Russian team, which is. being coached by Fedor Emelianenko, on the undercard of the first PPV. That way he'd get exposure, but wouldn't have to fight. I don't think that would help buys because the IFL went with the using big names as coaches concept and it wasn't an immediate big deal. Then again, if Angle was running around doing the publicity work for the show, his name would open a lot of doors and would build the brand name, which is really the most important thing at the beginning. There were suggestions to give Angle a three-fight deal, where he'd be given two guys who he could beat (don't laugh, there are plenty of guys like that around-a big guy with no takedown defense, and there are plenty of them, would be tailor-made for Angle even today) before having a serious match as No. 3. However, that was vetoed with the feeling that a star has to fight another star. Angle vs. Gracie, which at this point is a "no," is a terrible match-up for Angle. It's fair in that neither has ever done an MMA fight and both are former world champions in their sport (wrestling vs. BJJ), but Roger is current and would probably submit Angle quickly on the ground, as he submits the best submission guys and Angle even with months of training would still be a beginner level at avoiding submissions. This Gracie would submit Lesnar quickly as well, at least until Lesnar is much farther along in the learning curve. If Lesnar can learn to strike well, he'd have a good shot at winning because, in shape, no way could Gracie take him down and this Gracie isn't a striker either.

-Frank Shamrock's web site lists that he has signed with The World Fighter Championships to main event their first PPV show in early 2007 in Las Vegas. Chairman Jorge Elias claimed he had signed a multi-year and multimillion dollar contract. It will be interesting to see what

transpires a few months because that group is throwing such ridiculous dollar figures around. What I can say is Shamrock is at this point looking at fighting with the organization and looking to cut a deal for a big name opponent who can draw with him... Angle (there's that name again) is the "dream" choice in that they are trying to reach out to him and he'd likely be first choice if he's willing. There is a weight issue problem (Angle would have to cut to 205 and Shamrock would have to move up to 205. Shamrock would do it for that fight one would think, but Angle has always steadfastly avoided cutting weight. However, 205 may not be that bad for him because when he was thinking of going for the 2004 Olympics in wrestling, he was planning on wrestling at 211). Such a match would be one Angle wouldn't be likely to take, because you're talking a major experience differential.

-Rick Bassman is trying to round up investors to put on his own PPV with Tank Abbott vs. Butterbean and Angle's debut.

October 4, 2006

-In probably the best kept major secret in the entire time I've been covering pro wrestling, a video clip of Kurt Angle showed up at the end of the 9/24 TNA No Surrender PPV. Even with the Eric Bischoff appearance on Raw for the first time, while kept a secret from almost everyone, many had known the two sides were talking business going back a year and at one point were very close to a deal but Bischoff backed out. Lex Luger appearing on the first Nitro, which is very similar as far as presentation, was a surprise to a degree, but everyone in the know did know WCW and Luger were talking. People affiliated with Angle had told me TNA was the one place he wasn't interested in. It went so far that Dave Hawk, Angle's manager, during the week, announced Angle had retired as a pro wrestler and would be becoming an MMA fighter. Of course, after pulling the swerve, now you have to be skeptical of anything from the Angle side.. According to TNA officials, the Angle deal put together by Dixie Carter and Angle, with the only people in the company knowing about it being Jeff Jarrett and the company's CFO. Carter had asked a few weeks ago, basically to rank Bill Goldberg, Angle, Chris Jericho and maybe Brock Lesnar in the order of their potential benefit to the company. Apparently this was a prelude to making a big play for one of them. It is believed, although not known for sure, that Angle was the one favored. It was incorrect that Angle had a non-compete clause with WWE. WWE did pay him as if he had the non-compete clause until February, but had decided to sever all ties with him. Whether they would not have done that if TNA was, in their minds, a potential option for him, is an unanswered question. They figured he would wind up with big money offers coming from Japan and MMA, and while I'm sure, those who were looking out for him in their own minds hoped he wouldn't do that, from a business standpoint, they probably felt they couldn't stop him from doing either in a non-compete due to what the likely outcome of the Lesnar case would have been. Angle came to Nashville on 9/20, filmed secret vignettes in a local warehouse, and TNA did not even allow its regular television crew to film it, using a different crew, making them sign confidentiality papers and filming at midnight. The only thing that did get out is they hired several local independent workers to set up a ring, paid them well, and made them sign confidentiality agreements as well. But none of them saw Angle and they

left confused, believing that nobody ever got into the ring they set up. Angle wrote a six-page handwritten thank you letter to Carter that day, which apparently she was touched by. Angle did not come to Orlando for the show, for fear someone would see him on an airplane, although he and Carter were talking regularly through the night on telephone. At TV the next day, Christian was claiming to the wrestlers he talked to Angle on the phone and he sounded fine, since there was a lot of question regarding Angle's condition. During the show, almost nobody was let in on what the surprise was, and it was obviously probably more talk within the company than among fans. They did not mention on the final television show that there would be a surprise, as the show was taped ahead of time. For that reason, even with internet talk about it, based on our response, the hype itself led to negligible effects on the buy rate for the show. Historically, similar promises of something to change the landscape being announced on PPV have never drawn, even when WCW hyped them to death on television. Agents were speculating it was Bill Goldberg, Angle or The Rock. By that point maybe seven people in the company knew and were confident the surprise would live up to the billing as a move that changes the very fabric and history of pro wrestling. There are so many variables as to what this will mean. With Sting, it was a short-term boost, but in the long run, it didn't matter that much. The company's ratings now are lower, on average, than before Sting came, and buy rates are also down from pre-Sting levels after peaking in his early shows. Angle is more current. He's also a big risk. If wrestling, in particular, was a business that wanted to cleanse itself of some awful problems, companies wouldn't immediately hire people the other company dumps for fear of drug issues. You can't take what Angle says publicly about anything seriously, since he publicly claimed he was going to rest and listed assorted injuries, and made it clear he wanted to come back to WWE, but needed time off. Then he was quitting wrestling for MMA. Now he's doing a 180, saying he wasn't happy in WWE and thanked Dixie Carter for saving his career. At press time, Angle is scheduled to appear live on the 10/9 TV tapings in Orlando, which puts his TV debut most likely on 10/12. He's also booked on the 10/22 Bound for Glory show. At this point his role will be special ringside enforcer for the Jarrett vs. Sting NWA title match, which means he'll beat up some guys who try to interfere. A major advertising campaign is expected to be built around him, perhaps with the catch phrase, "The ring has six sides, but only one Angle." To me, it would make the most sense to not have him air on television, so the PPV is the debut, and debut him on television on 11/16, backed up with a major ad campaign to build a "tell-all" first interview to establish the new time slot. Angle's contract is non-exclusive, which means he can do MMA. Both Hawk, Angle's manager, and TNA officials, have confirmed that much regarding how the deal was structured. Hawk said Angle is still listening to offers and has suggested to UFC the idea for Angle to coach the next season of Ultimate Fighter, to build to a PPV match. The problem inherent in that is Angle may make an excellent wrestling technique coach for the show, but MMA wrestling is different from folkstyle and freestyle wrestling, not to mention Angle has no experience himself in other aspects of MMA. Angle is too big a name to be used simply as an assistant coach, and if he were to be on the show, he'd have to be a focal point. While the idea sounds good, and may be great for ratings and drawing a buy rate for a match, it has major drawbacks even if Angle was healthy. "TNA is a working business passion he wants to do," said Hawk. "He also still wants to train for MMA." Hawk said with whom is not decided, but that Angle would fight next summer. Before the TNA contract was announced, but after the deal was already

completed, Hawk had said there would be a story in one of the MMA magazines shortly where Angle would announce the particulars of a new MMA deal. A close friend of Angle's stated, "He will continue to talk about MMA to leverage other potential deals, but sadly, may buckle under a large money deal. His inner circle needs to make Kurt aware of the imminent danger of fighting when he is essentially a sitting duck with a bad neck that will be exploited. Kurt needs to take 2006 off and get mentally and physically ready. Denial is a deadly emotion." Of all the options for him, the best option for his physical health would be retirement. Angle's athletic drive, an admirable quality in college and leading to the Olympics when you consider his accomplishments, and really in his early WWE years, has turned against him. Retirement will only happen if nobody will use him. That simply isn't feasible, because the day he was a free agent, every organization around wanted him. He will never make that call himself until he winds up like the Dynamite Kid (who was wheelchair bound by the age of 40), or worse. Of all the organizations involved in this specific instance, the only one acting with anything close to Angle's interests at heart, and not their own, is WWE, when they let him go. In the big picture, I don't know that WWE is any better than anyone else, although with their wellness program in place, they are the leaders, with no followers, in a behind-the-times industry when it comes to health of workers. In this story, they are the only admirable people. In doing so, they have potentially handed their opposition, if not oppositions, the opportunity to grow their companies. At Raw the next night in Oklahoma City, it was the only thing people were talking about. From backstage, it was said that not one person acted upset, betrayed or angry about Angle going to TNA. Even office people made no negative comments about Angle going in competition. Nobody was aware of his letter that was negative about the company at that time. Everyone was just hoping Angle would recognize his condition, and some were saying they hope he realizes the reality of the situation and environment he was getting into. If anything, the prevailing belief was tempered relief, because it was almost universally felt this was better for him in the long run, than going into UFC. Dixie Carter should be commended from a business standpoint for putting together the biggest deal in that she got the guy everyone wanted. Dana White was confident enough that he had Angle after their recent talks, that he was expected to sign Daniel Puder for the match later this week. While the match isn't dead, I can't see it happening now. Time will tell, but based on many things, most being how this story plays out, Carter could be commended from a non-business standpoint as well, but to do so means she and her company have to be vigilant, proactive and not reactive, in handling a potential franchise player who is dealing with very serious pain and injury issues. If the roles were reversed, and it was TNA firing someone for their own good, and WWE was the down-and-out organization, do you really believe WWE would pass up on a potentially valuable piece of talent? WWE has taken many people who are high risk in that regard of late, and none of them were close to Angle's level of stardom. The fact Angle was fired, as one of those "right" decisions, makes TNA have to take every precaution necessary in this project. For Angle, since he's going to do something, TNA is the best place to be if WWE would not give him a much easier schedule or have the patience to deal with him. While MMA would be more money with less repeated pounding, going in an unscripted environment can and most likely would destroy a great deal of his credibility, not to mention he could get hurt badly. Plus, he would have to train at a far greater capacity for MMA than pro wrestling. The actual two fights per year against even 35 to 50 pro wrestling matches would likely be easier on the body, but the risk factor in fighting

is greater. The pounding of full-time WWE wrestling, with the travel and 150- plus matches, is the worst option of all, but also the road he would still be traveling today if WWE hadn't intervened. I don't know that TNA is going to be worse on him than fighting when you factor in training is more bodybuilding and aerobics, and also at a far less intense level, as opposed to the crazy, maniacal level of training in so many aspects that it would put to learn kickboxing and submissions from scratch, and that he would do if he competed because of his nature. In TNA, the travel is minimal and number of matches is low. The problem is the next catch-22. For Angle to make a real difference in TNA, he's going to have to become a can't miss performer both in and out of the ring. With WWE, he could get away with taking it easier in his matches, doing the one minute squashes on television and only taking a few bumps on house shows, and saving his big performances for a few TV main events and the PPV shows. He probably wouldn't like it, but he could get away with, and at times when the company was worried about his health, that's how they booked him. In TNA, his drive is going to be where he's going to want to be the top worker in the company, just like he was driven to be, and many felt he was, for much of his tenure in WWE. He's going to want to have the five-star match with Samoa Joe. He's going to be always in the main event position and thus he will not only want to give the main event performance, but will be counted on to do so. The TNA style is more dangerous than the WWE style on a per match basis. In WWE, the younger guys who don't feel the bumps as much are held back and taught a slower style for a number of reasons. In TNA, nobody is held back in the ring other than being limited on time, and while the ultra-competitive Angle won't be competing with as high level of true workers to be the stand out top dog, he'll be competing with hungrier guys who compensate for that by doing so much more and taking so many more risks, and who are generally more spectacular. In the end, Kurt Angle will be the best wrestler in TNA. Or he'll die trying. One would hope, at the very least, that TNA, both to cover itself, and for Angle's own good, starts a drug testing program. Now, there is almost no chance this will happen, and even if it does, are they going to enforce it? It took WWE how long to already back off on suspensions, and that company is hardly under the gun to risk money losses by losing a main eventer. With a company banking itself on Angle being a success, and this is hardly limited to Angle, it's just not in the ways of wrestling to do much more than what they did for Shane Douglas. If someone with a problem asks for help, at that point they will let him know his job is safe and give him time to get himself healthy. TNA has already started a track record of that much, but Angle will never fit into that category of the guy who comes to them and asks. WWE has ordered people into rehab, at the point of threatening their jobs if they don't go. Many times. Even with the WWE policy, Angle never failed a test for painkillers, because whatever he took in that regard, he had a prescription for, although he did fail for something else. There are limitations, as plenty of dead wrestlers have been found with prescription bottles by their side. But the fact there are limitations is no excuse for not doing whatever is legitimately possible to avert a tragedy. People who lived through both have seen incredible similarities between Angle and the late Brian Pillman, who passed away nine years ago this month, and whose DVD just came out. If anything, Angle is an even more heavily driven overachiever, but they share similar athletic mentalities as well as emotional fragilities. Their behavior is so identical that it is scary, other than of the two, Angle is the more extreme. And if WWE had handled Pillman differently, and cut him loose before his death, he would have been in WCW's arms the next day. I can't say for sure it would be the

same ending, just on somebody else's watch, but if you ask the people who knew him best, and on this account, I'm in that club, I'd bet everyone would give the same answer I would: It most likely would. I hope somebody heeds these warnings. I don't believe anybody will, but you can never stop hoping. If you say it's up to the individual, due to the nature of the business, in the end you are right. It is. And that's the scary part. Brian Pillman never would have heeded these warning. Kurt Angle never will. The WWE tried to step in for Pillman. With the benefit of hindsight, probably not as much as they would have with more experience, and the handling of Angle (and many others, whose names are both public and private) is probably in more than a small way the results of some of that experience. His wife tried to step in. His friends, honestly, sat idly by (and to avoid any confusion, I am very much blaming myself in that camp), or in the end, many would simply have nothing to do with him. In this case, everyone, whether it is WWE, TNA-everyone--hopes for the best for Kurt Angle. As noted, given the knowledge that he would not stop and nobody will ever make him stop, that's just reality, it is possible, maybe likely, this is the best place for him. But I hope to God now that he's made this decision that all this MMA talk goes nowhere, and this, and maybe a rare big money match in Japan, is the extent of his work in the ring. And that TNA doesn't ignore the lessons of the last ten years of pro wrestling, and at least takes precautions as part of this project. MMA is a full-time lifestyle. Because of the nature of the TNA schedule, it is very plausible he could almost full-time study the skills necessary and train, but for him to actually fight, he'd need to take time off from wrestling. Anyone would be ill-advised to do both at the same time. Hopefully the statement about Sunday night being a night that will live forever in wrestling history and change the very fabric of the business is not prophetic, at least in the wrong way.

-Angle's actual statement, handwritten on a hotel notepad in Nashville this past week after shooting his vignettes, read as follows:

"Being with TNA feels like I have finally found my home. I had fun in WWE at certain times. But I was never really happy. Now being part of TNA, I know I have a purpose. I feel like I am part of history, part of a company that is not only on the rise-not only going to be the number one watched wrestling show in the world within a short period of time- but TNA gives me an opportunity to spread my wings. The company has no limits to where it can go. The sky is the limit and the main reason is because they brought the 'real' back into wrestling and that is a perfect fit for the greatest wrestler in USA Olympic history. I have room to grow here and to help TNA grow. Working for these caring and very giving employers of TNA makes me feel like I have a purpose and that the sky is the limit. I don't feel trapped or held back like I did the first six years in my tenure with the other company. They held me back. Now, our wonderful audience will see the real Kurt Angle doing what I love to do-real wrestling-and that's what puts a smile on my face each time I come to work. I even smile when I think about it. TNA will be the most watched television show on cable television. It's only a matter of time. Now, I get the opportunity and privilege of being part of it. Thank you TNA for saving my career, my life and my desire to do what I love. I will be here in some capacity for the rest of my life. That's real ... that's damn real."

Kurt Angle

October 4, 2006

-The aftermath of TNA's surprising signing of Kurt Angle has led to the next question, which is, what becomes of it. The surprise was great, although there were wrestlers in the company, particularly those who lived through WCW, who saw it as a negative, pointing out it made nobody any money, and when WCW became enamored for working the boys and doing surprises, it was one of many reasons it went down the tubes. Still, this one wasn't a negative. Nobody was lied to, at least by TNA. It wasn't a promise that didn't, at least to a degree, live up to the hype. Does it really change the face of wrestling? Probably very little, but it can be a building block if the dominos fall correctly. It wasn't as if they promised a wrestling in the main event as a surprise, it drew no extra buys (and this surprise, as best we can tell, had no effect on the buy rate, and it couldn't have anyway since it was never plugged on television), and then they pissed away the first Angle match. Instead, all the "money" specifics are still on the table. Most people I've talked with felt the idea of his first PPV appearance on Bound for Glory, his first interview on 11/16 and his first match on a subsequent PPV made the most sense. And two-thirds of that is happening. The television debut will be taped on 10/1/9. As things stand, the 10/5 episode of Impact will heavily push that "next week" (the 10/12 show) that Angle will be there, presumably to do a lengthy interview. He will be the ringside enforcer at Bound for Glory, for the Jeff Jarrett vs. Sting match. His first actual match is scheduled for the November PPV (or December). The final decision hasn't been made, but the two most talked about names for his first program are Sting and Samoa Joe. With Sting, it can be promoted as a dream match and with the right advertising, may get some casual buyer interest that TNA has never received, and should easily set the company's buy rate record (which is around 50,000 right now). Whether they go in that direction or not, the Angle vs. Samoa Joe match, and probably series of matches, is going to be held, most likely sooner than later. The list of people who knew about Angle before he was revealed is short. According to TNA sources, Angle definitely made it clear to the company that he was planning on doing MMA along with pro wrestling. There is a belief he's going to do it, as much as that seems to make no sense. There are those in TNA who wouldn't be negative to an Angle vs. Daniel Puder UFC match, because nearly any outcome could possibly work in TNA's favor, and it would even benefit the company to push that UFC match on their television. The negative is, if I was UFC, I wouldn't want a match pushed on a pro wrestling show, or to match up to active pro wrestlers. Angle can still draw in UFC as a pro wrestler, but his opponent should not be someone who is working in the same promotion, because of the credibility issue, or a match built up on a pro wrestling television show. TNA sources say that the very short list of people who were aware of Angle appearing on No Surrender and signing included Dana White, because Angle or his people told White because they didn't want him feeling double-crossed since they were in strong negotiations with him. It was said only three people in TNA knew until the last day or two before the show. A few were let in on the day of the show, including announcers Mike Tenay and Don West, who were told right before they went on the air, because of the feeling they would sell it better if they had the

confidence in it to know it wouldn't be a disappointment. As far as how Angle is going to be used, it would appear he would have to be positioned as a babyface at first. There was fear of Angle vs. Sting because of the feeling the Orlando crowd may turn on Sting, and the company is still very protective of him. My belief is the crowd would cheer Angle more if it was his first match in, but would respect Sting's status to not boo him unless Sting did a heel turn. Of the major signings by TNA, Team 3-D were popular, but now they are just names on the mid-card. Christian Cage has been with the company for almost a year, had a world title reign, hasn't done one job, and isn't even a ratings draw let alone a PPV mover. Overall his run has been disappointing because he really doesn't come across as anything more than a relatively entertaining guy who just filled a spot on the WWE roster for years. Sting's early numbers were very strong, but he's a nostalgia act in 2006 and their value diminishes usually quickly. The idea of a several month build to a Jarrett vs. Sting program as the focal point of the company wound up with nobody really caring about it once they got there. Part of the problem may have been Sting had no marquee value opponent. Sting was never, like Hulk Hogan or Steve Austin or any of the great draws in history. He was a guy who, if put in with someone who is a big draw themselves, made for a marquee program. Sting has unfinished business with Christian, and if you look back, you can see it's been booked since New Year's Eve for a Sting vs. Christian feud. What it means, and with the booking change, if it's still on, is anyone's guess. Angle is more current than Sting and a far bigger star than Christian. But he's also a guy who was never the marquee drawing card himself, but someone, if he was out there with Rock or Austin, could draw big numbers. But Angle's albatross is his legacy of great matches in WWE. One of the sad facts as great workers vs. great gimmicks is if you get over as a great gimmick performer, like The Sheik or Abdullah the Butcher, they can be 55 and do pretty much everything they did at 35. If you are a top flight worker, and your rep is based on having great matches, you get hurt a lot more by injuries and age. There is a point where the Angle euphoria among the small TNA base of fans, and the company, will dwindle and it'll be back to reality, probably within few weeks. The jury is very much out on him right now. But even at the early part of the year, he had some awesome matches with Randy Orton, Rey Mysterio and Undertaker, and where if they didn't have their time cut so badly, his match would have stolen the show at Mania. With Sting, they avoided putting him out in long singles match for fear of him being exposed. With Angle, at least on PPV, at first, he's going to be put in a position to deliver. TNA is not the mental pressure cooker WWE can be, and he's guaranteed a top position and the world title at some point over the next year, neither of which he could be guaranteed in WWE. And Angle has always been someone who covets the title far more than most, perhaps based on the signification of a title being so important to him based on all the ones he won in real competition.

-Some Jim Ross thoughts on Raw for this past week... On Kurt Angle: "What is the over/under on how long Kurt Angle stays in TNA? I think the world of Kurt and hope he gets totally healthy much sooner than later. Perhaps being a part of TNA will work for Kurt as it relates to travel and in-ring demands. I do think this genre is much better suited for Angle than MMA, UFC. I wish Kurt well on his new opportunity."

October 9, 2006

-The continuation of the Kurt Angle saga is that UFC has apparently pulled out of having interest in Angle and Dixie Carter of TNA responded to criticism of the company's decision to sign Angle. "Once I knew that Kurt would be available, we immediately wanted to talk with him and, hopefully, sign him," said Carter. "Knowing how big this announcement was for TNA, I just felt it could be one of the true surprises in pro wrestling. "Am I shocked by some of the negative response?," she said. "I'm more saddened by it- for Kurt. I know this has hurt him very much." Others in TNA had noted the negative response and noted that when it appeared Angle was headed to UFC, that they didn't feel they was getting a negative response in pursuing him and were surprised they did upon announcing the surprise deal. UFC also wasn't going to put Angle in a match until next summer. The problem is, while those close to the situation have been concerned about Angle for some time, much of the reaction is natural based on Angle's own public statements in recent weeks. When he was fired by WWE, Angle tried to portray it as him needing time off because he couldn't wrestle without painkillers and needed a good amount of time off to rest. He talked about three different muscle injuries suffered in his last match, and that he needed pain pills just to get off the couch and take out the garbage. His statements went from loving working to WWE, to never being happy there, and from saying pro wrestling ruined him, to signing to do pro wrestling. It is part of a bigger problem that goes both ways. It has become a routine situation where wrestlers released from one company with drug issues are then picked up by the other company. It's no different from the criticism the CFL has taken from allowing players under NFL suspensions to play this season. "Kurt has been cleared by his team of doctors to wrestle, and I have that verification from the doctors," she said. "I have personally met with Kurt and his wife. All past medical and pain medication issues have been addressed in depth and to my satisfaction. We have assembled a team of doctors around Kurt to monitor past injuries and also oversee his health on an ongoing basis." Angle is likely to have his first match with the company in November, as he's being advertised to face Christian Cage on 11/25 at Arena Monterrey, in the biggest TNA live show in its history. Samoa Joe was his most talked about potential opponent (and the final decisions had not been made at press time) for his first TNA PPV match. TNA has also decided against booking Angle for any independent dates, which shows a concern for not wanting to have-him work more than a few dates per month. Originally, word was getting out that Angle would be available for outside bookings through TNA for \$5,000 per shot. ROH in particular was going to make a play for multiple dates on him at that price as well as attempt to get a DVD interview deal. Carter addressed pro wrestling's lengthy history of drug problems, including many young deaths, saying, "It's a huge concern, of course. First, one of the benefits of working for TNA wrestling is the schedule that our talent has, which prevents the enormous physical strain on a body. Second, our talent does not secure their spot on our roster by the mass of their bodies. If a TNA star is injured, or has personal issues that he or she needs to address, that talent will not be put in a situation where he or she has to wrestle. The talent might still be on-air in a different capacity, but we would never do anything that could lead to further injury. If a leave-of-absence is necessary for treatment, it is an option which we have utilized in the past." Carter said the company has a very strict drug and alcohol policy and that their contracts allow for random testing, with penalties of mandatory counseling and treatment, suspensions and firing. She would not address the

specifics of the policy, claiming they were a private company and the talent are independent contractors. No wrestlers in the company were aware of anyone ever being drug tested, or being forced to attend counseling. There have been suspensions and firings for no-shows that may have been drug related, but it was for the no-showing of important dates. If the Angle signing leads to the company being more vigilant on the issue and they watch Angle closely, that is all that they can be expected to do. As noted the moment Angle was let go, virtually every major company in pro wrestling and MMA was after his services. TNA would seem like the best option, at least health-wise, for Angle, if he's not going to retire or take a lengthy time period off. The problem is, there is a reason he was let go by WWE, and it wasn't for not doing a job or for a creative issue with the company. Carter said that the company's goal is for a long-term relationship with Angle, and recognizing his mental drive being off the charts, that they may have to step in if he's hurting and wants to keep going, and they are aware of that going in. Carter noted the prime time move was in place before the signing of Angle, and that Angle had agreed to come to TNA even before she had told him about the prime time move. She also was fairly certain the show would eventually be two hours, saying, "To me, there's no doubt we are going to two hours, it's just a matter of when." A two hour move would open up more time and not have Impact feel rushed, as it often does. It will enable new directions to be opened, including signing new talent as well as putting more emphasis on women performers. Far more importantly, and while terms are not known, the additional hour would likely result in a far stronger financial situation for the company, as the rights fees for programming from Spike would increase. Dana White said this week in interviews with both myself and Alex Marvez that you can be an entertainer, or you can be a fighter, but he doesn't have any interest in people doing both. He would have no problem with a guy who did pro wrestling with the right background who then trained and worked full-time at fighting, but expressed no interest in using an active full-time pro wrestler. He noted how Angle had been saying how his body was so damaged by pro wrestling and he wanted to rest and go into fighting. "I want guys who want to be real fighters," he said. "We had a great meeting (when Angle came to Las Vegas, staying in a luxury suite at the Red Rock, to work out the deal with UFC a few weeks ago) and I honestly thought we had him," said White. White revealed his plans were almost exactly what Angle's side had talked about wanting. The agreement was that Angle would appear on Ultimate Fighter 5, which starts filming in January, as a wrestling coach on one of the teams, while at the same time his role in the show would be to learn the other skills with the fighters. That show would air April through June, and then he would debut, most likely with the Daniel Puder fight, on next year's June or July PPV show. "He's a nice guy, but I'm not going to blur the line (between pro wrestling and MMA). He told me that pro wrestling ruined his life, and the next thing you know, he tells me he's going back to pro wrestling." White acknowledged by not going any farther with the deal, it could leave the potential for Pride or an upstart group to use Angle's name to up their profile in North America. While White wouldn't reveal numbers, he said Angle did come to him with his TNA offer and UFC topped it, but said, "They have to be paying him a boatload of money," TNA has always had interest from the start in working with the higher-profile UFC, even before either group had signed with Spike TV. UFC never had any interest, even when both companies were struggling, because of the credibility issue. White had been confident enough of signing Angle that he had already talked contract with Puder as his first opponent, a name the Angle camp seemed happy with and agreed to at the time. It's hard to

ascertain what kind of business Angle would bring because in the U.S., there is nothing close to a prior example to look at. He possibly could have done monster business on the first show, both because Angle himself knows how to promote, the match had a great story, and because he has more of a mainstream name than anyone who has ever fought in UFC. With UFC pulling out, at least publicly, it doesn't kill prospects of Angle fighting because he's actually potentially more valuable to other groups because he can put them on the map, but realistically, doing both pro wrestling and fighting at the same time isn't going to work. Angle will turn 38 at the end of this year, and still taking the bumps as a wrestler and with his existing injuries, MMA is a terrible fit. Randy Couture, who as a former national wrestling champion who went into UFC at the age of 34, would have as good a perspective of anyone. "He'd get his ass knocked out," said Couture. "In MMA today, you're only as strong as your weakest link," said Carlos Newton. "Because the name of the game is exploiting your opponent's weaknesses." Angle, in a 2005 interview on Live Audio Wrestling, said that he believed with six months of training he'd be able to beat anyone in MMA. Tokyo Sports reported that Sadaharu Tanigawa made an offer to Angle, and the story did acknowledge his signing a TNA contract. They claimed Tanigawa is trying to book Angle vs. Brock Lesnar for next year on a U.S. Hero's event. Tanigawa said he wanted assurance that Angle was physically in shape to fight. Even though Angle once beat Lesnar in a close backstage wrestling challenge at a WWE show in Fargo, ND, I don't see Angle doing this match, or any match, because Lesnar is serious about his MMA training and has devoted full-time to it. The article also talked about wanting him for the 12/31 Kyocera (Osaka Dome) show, again mentioning Lesnar, Akebono or Choi Hong-man as potential opponents. With both Pride and Hero's, not to mention Bodog, WFA, Strike Force, and World Fighter (as well as others who will likely turn up) all attempting to cash in on the UFC's PPV success in the U.S. by running major events in North America and on PPV, there are plenty of suitors, TNA's of the MMA world looking for that mainstream name to get into a game that is lucrative at the top. Pride built its organization in Japan on the back of using pro wrestlers who had nowhere near the credentials of Angle, some of whom were older and hadn't kept up their training as much. But the evolution of the sport makes that a terrible fit, even if Angle was in shape. Yoshiaki Yatsu, who went to the Olympics in wrestling, took one of the most horrendous beatings ever when he was well into his 40s and faced Gary Goodridge. It would be sad to see Angle in this position, and quite frankly, against a top opponent, that would probably be the result. My feeling was, no matter what has been said, that the minute he signed with TNA, he gave up any thoughts of fighting, if he's logical. Some have done it in Japan, and Dan Severn has done both simultaneously for more than a decade, but most of that period he's been doing low level shows in both genres. Angle's people turned down a \$500,000 offer to face Roger Gracie, although they were looking at a December date, which was far too soon, and Angle's people were looking for a multi-fight deal, and with a PPV percentage, would have earned far more in UFC. Pride and Hero's have a history of spending big money for freak attractions, and World Fighter is putting on paper ridiculous amounts of money, but you have to be skeptical of its possibilities. Angle's people have not expressed interest in a proposed match with Frank Shamrock for The World Fighter in 2007, which would put that organization, which at least on paper is putting ridiculous money on the table for fighters, on the map (provided Shamrock gets past Phil Baroni unscathed). According to one source involved in the talks, "(We are) still working on Angle, but no luck. They are protecting him good," which basically means his people wisely have no

interest in him facing real opposition. Others involved in negotiations with him have echoed the idea he doesn't want to face anyone real, and to me, that makes him smart, and TNA is the best call. As noted last week, Angle's manager Dave Hawk said they were looking for offers from any company, and still stated he would fight next summer. But at the time he wrote it, it's presumed the fight he meant was the UFC deal, and that appears to be off the table.

-Sting was one of the few people let in on the Angle signing. Sting was in Nashville the day Angle was in town for the vignettes, and Dixie Carter said she had a surprise for him. Dave Hawk came in first and Sting didn't understand, and then Angle came in and Sting freaked out.

-Jim Ross had more on Angle: "No one betrayed anyone here. Kurt needed to step away from the WWE heel. It's that simple. For anyone to say Kurt was held back is a little far fetched to me. Kurt made a ton of money in the WWE and earned a worldwide reputation. What else was he going to do while in the WWE? This business is about making cash, plain and simple. Kurt made big money and got famous in the WWE. He deserved all his accolades and the rewards that went with them. TNA is not going to become an overnight sensation with or without Kurt Angle. One man does not a company make." I don't know that one man ever made a company, but Hogan, Rogers and Inoki at their peaks, and probably Austin as well, sure made an incredible difference. Not saying Angle is that guy, but if you took Austin out of the mix, the WWE would have never been nearly as popular, and it made an extreme difference in the balance of power in the Monday Night Wars.

October 16, 2006

- WWE sent a nasty legal letter to Angle with a series of demands. Not sure o fall of them, because I was only told the comedy sections. The funniest is that they demanded Angle and TNA never refer to his ankle lock finisher as the "Angle lock." Angle was joking because he had no idea anyone had ever called it the "Angle lock" to begin with, thinking it's always been the ankle lock. They also demanded that Angle not call himself "The Wrestling Machine," or "The Machine," and that while he can wear a mouthpiece, it can't have "Machine" written on it. I guess we'll find out next week when he gives Joe the former Angle slam, if WWE claimed ownership of that (and quite frankly, they have the right to) and what new name is used. The U.S. Olympic committee wouldn't allow them to use the "Olympic slam" name, even though that's the name used in NOAH when Takashi Sugiura uses the same move

-There was a one-time return of "Byte This" on 10/17 with an interview with Vince. They had asked fans to send in intelligent questions to the site, and apparently didn't do well in that regard, because with the exception of the Angle discussion, there wasn't much... On Angle, he said it was a big blow to the company. He said Angle had tremendous drive, but it's that drive that will end up being his demise. He said Angle pushed himself beyond what his body could take, saying he has numerous permanent injuries and his neck has substantially deteriorated since 1996. He said the way Angle wrestles, he gets hurt every night and you can't do that. He said Angle doesn't think long-term and needs to. McMahon said Angle only thinks of now. He said a lot of the story of Angle leaving is confidential, but said it revolves around his health. He

said he wished Angle would have taken a long time off before getting back into wrestling. He said his idea was for Angle to take a long time off, recover as much as he could and then come back to WWE. He said he's not mad at Angle for the decision he made, but he thought they had an understanding Angle would let himself heal and then come back to WWE.

-TNA was very supportive Angle doing Ultimate Fighter. I didn't hear any feedback on the proposed fight with Puder directly, other than they were not the slightest bit against the UFC plans for Angle that they were aware of. They considered the coaching a positive for exposure and in getting Angle over. Kevin Kay, who is the head guy at Spike, was also a big proponent of that idea, feeling the tie-in would help both shows. Angle was also wanting to do it. Dana White nixed the idea because he doesn't want a wrestling/UFC tie-in. My impression is with Angle-Puder as it pertains to TNA, no matter what would happen, there would be ways to work it to their benefit coming out of it. It's not a controlled situation, but it's not a New Japan situation either where a top pro wrestler gets creamed and all you've done is hurt yourself, because in a "worst case" scenario, maybe you come out of it with what WWE probably should have done, and that is have a potential new star handed to you, or at least a unique program handed to you. White didn't want to be doing matches to set up angles for a pro wrestling company either, and likely would have insisted on Puder and Angle both signing contracts that wouldn't allow them to do pro wrestling during the terms of their UFC contract. He had told Puder that directly, that if he signed him, there was no pro wrestling, and when talking with Angle, Angle was so negative about pro wrestling that he figured it was a moot point. From White's standpoint, it's probably the right move. TNA has from the start, at many times proposed and wanted an affiliation with UFC, and UFC has never wanted an affiliation with TNA.

-Backstage, Angle seemed very happy, sharp mentally and totally coherent. A couple of people who would know any signs of any kind of significant pill usage described him as appearing to be 100% clean. They are giving him a special ring entrance, where he comes from underneath the entrance platform like Rey Mysterio, but unlike Mysterio, he raises from the bottom like Lawler used to do in the early 80s on Memphis big shows, but doesn't jump in the air.

-Hogan was on Bubba the Love Sponge on 10/11 and claimed Angle told Vince he was going to commit suicide and that's why Vince released him from his contract (I'll just say that's not exactly what I heard, but not too far from it either). Even though they never question anything Hogan says on that show, Bubba's producer said he doubted very seriously that really happened and were going to try and get Angle on to get his side of it.

-There are negotiations going on for a national Coca-Cola TV commercial that would include Angle and Blue Demon Jr.

-Jeff Jarrett did an interview with Alex Marvez this past week for the Observer web site. He said that in the internal meetings we wrote about, that Angle was the guy they believed would be the top potential acquisition for the company, noting Rock and Austin are off limits. We had presumed that was the case as they had asked the top people their opinions regarding Angle,

Goldberg, Jericho and maybe Lesnar (I know for sure the other three were discussed, not sure about Lesnar). I was under the impression Angle was decided as the top choice and the Dixie Carter went all out to sign him but had not been told that directly. Regarding the signing, he said, "Everything in business is a calculated risk and this is certainly one we want to take. In this business, you have to take risks in order for rewards. We've certainly put measures in place like doctors evaluations and constant monitoring. More than anything, and I lived it in the WWF/WCW days, working 20-25 days a month is what he was doing. We know that's not a reality in TNA. Above anything, that's the No. 1 factor as far as why I don't think Kurt will have health problems here."

-NEW JAPAN: They ran Sumo Hall for the biggest show since G-1 on 10/9, drawing 7,000 fans, which, considering how well they've drawn at Sumo Hall of late, they can't be unhappy with, even for such a loaded line-up...Simon Inoki was backstage telling people that since they drew 10,000 fans (that was the announced figure, but it wasn't even close to that), he thinks they should run a Tokyo Dome show on January 4th as is the tradition. This year, with heavy papering, they had 31,000 in the building but only about 10,000 paid, which they could fit into Sumo Hall and the cost of doing the show would be far less. Simon is trying to sign Bob Sapp for the show, as well as make a deal with TNA to be able to get Kurt Angle for one night.

-The 5th annual Ward Family Promotioi.(show to benefit the University of Virginia Children's Hospital, which has been one of the biggest and best drawing indies every year, will take place on 11/02/28 in Waynesboro VA. It's not as loaded as in the past, with X-Pac (with Scott Hall as manager) vs. Evan Karagias as the main event, after they were unable to get Angle.

October 23, 2006

-Notes from the 10/12 Impact TV show... Worse, the whole show was built around the exclusive first Angle interview. What a giant letdown. It was 2:00 of jump cuts, where he said very little. He did admit to being addicted in the past to extra-strength Vicodin. He didn't actually say, but gave the indication he got off the addiction cold turkey. He had a few minor knocks at WWE, but really said nothing specific, just that he was irked that someone in the company told him he wasn't special, and that Vince McMahon told him, "An Olympic gold medal and a cup of coffee don't mean shit." I was left wondering if Angle was so messed up that he couldn't get right McMahon saying, "An Olympic gold medal can't buy you a cup of coffee," or if McMahon was so far gone he tried to say the latter, which is akin to a famous saying, and botched it to where it made almost no sense. Angle said he had the eye of the tiger and was there to prove to McMahon that he missed out. As far as motivation goes, if his sole motivation is to prove something to Vince McMahon, he's still a prisoner to something that isn't good. He did say that over the past year he's recognized that wrestling isn't the most important thing in his life, family is.

-Angle did an interview in Tokyo Sports where he said doing MMA is a goal he wants to do, but said he would likely only do one match. He said he wanted it to be against a big name, and talked about UFC or Pride. He said he's need six months of training, so New Year's Eve or K-1 looks to be out, and said he'd like to train under Ken Shamrock (clearly he needs to pay closer

attention) or Randy Couture. He talked about Brock Lesnar as a prospective opponent (Haro's is interested in putting that match together). He said his neck is at 80% right now. Hey, that's what he said.

-Angle has also been added to the 10/30 show in Lisbon, Portugal, so that would be his first match under the TNA banner.

October 25, 2006

After a media conference and an appearance on Bubba the Love Sponge by Kurt Angle, with the idea to quell people's fears about his condition, the result largely ended up being the opposite. His main purpose seemed to be to say that he quit WWE on his own, and that he wasn't pushed out nor fired. He said the public statements by the company that it was a mutual decision was something they asked him if they could say to save face. But Angle's statements were filled with so many contradictions that when it was over, you were left not knowing what to think. His biggest statement was that he had not taken a painkiller in three years (later in the day, after repeating that on Bubba, Spike issued a release saying Angle wanted to correct himself and say that it was really 18 months, citing he went cold turkey around the time of the February 20, 2005, No Way Out PPV in Pittsburgh). He claimed at the time he had wanted to rid himself of painkillers (he claimed on Bubba he was taking up to 60 percocets a day- wrestlers who were friends in WWE didn't buy that figure with one stating "Kurt's a great guy, but he's a worker. He embellishes a lot when he tells stories."), and went to a doctor who told he needed three months in rehab. He said Vince refused to give him the time off. "You're an Olympic gold medalist. Suck it up. " He said Vince told him he could rehab himself on the road. Angle said he was going through withdrawals and being badly sick while on the road. He said he was afraid he was going to have a heart attack in his match with Cena. He said that's where the relationship with McMahon went sour. "I felt like nobody cared about me. They cared about me making someone look good. I made him (Cena) look better than he actually was to make him ready for Wrestlemania." He then said he was moved from Raw to Smackdown because Jon Heidenreich's blood pressure was bad and he had to replace him on a show in Baltimore (actually Philadelphia, but that's an understandable mistake). This three month period where Angle supposedly wanted off would have meant the Wrestlemania match with Shawn Michaels that was starting to be built would be out. To most in the company, this story was completely new. One friend of Angle's said that Angle had told him the story after he was fired as to why he and Vince stopped seeing eye-to-eye, but it had never been mentioned at the time it happened. Angle was very negative regarding McMahon in both interviews, and when someone tried to get him to say McMahon gave him a chance, he only would thank Pat Patterson and Jerry Brisco for helping teach him pro wrestling in his early period on the road. Another said Angle's repeated and passionate denials of being hurt was the reason why McMahon continued to push him while others wanted to take him out believing he was hurting himself badly by keeping going. When people would suggest in the past that Angle may need attention or even rehab, it's said McMahon always believed Angle above anyone else, because Angle always claimed he was fine and not hurt. Forgetting the difference between 18 months and three years, the big

problem here is two months ago, in an AP interview days after he was let go, he told the AP that he made the decision to step away from pro wrestling for now because he was unable to wrestle without using pain medication and was no longer willing to take them to perform. He said he needed pills just to be able to take out the garbage because his body was hurting so bad. Two months later, it's a completely different story, and he's claiming to be close to 100% healthy. Many have also brought up that shortly before he was let go, he was suspended for 30 days on a drug test violation, which was reported everywhere as having to do with painkillers. The subject never came up, but as noted here many times, Angle never tested positives for usage of any painkillers, at least without a prescription, which would have violated the new company drug policy. He blamed McMahon and the company schedule for his marriage problems. Angle had, on separate occasions, both been separated and close to divorce, but he and wife Karen are together and his wife was with him doing the interview. One thing clear is that his wife had less use for McMahon than he did, and liked Dixie Carter. About the only thing positive out of all this is that if Angle is going to continue to perform, TNA is the best possible place for him. He went so far as to say Vince would have liked it if he was single because that would mean he could spend more time on the road, and Angle noted that he was on the road more than almost any other wrestler because he did so much media (Angle, Mystério and Cena are the guys who during that period were getting virtually no time off). The Vince criticism continued with him saying that Vince never spent ten days a year with his family when his kids were growing up and he didn't want to be like that. He noted that he simply can't perform going less than 100%. He said he tried, but it didn't work. He said Carter and him have an understanding that he will work 100% when he's healthy, but unlike in the past, if he can't go 100%, he won't wrestle and will take time off. He talked extensively about MMA, which at times bordered on delusional. He noted K-1 did talk to him about a New Year's Eve match with Brock Lesnar, and said every MMA promotion was throwing around "retirement" money. On Bubba, he claimed Pride had offered him a \$30 million five-year deal for 15 fights at \$2 million per fight. He claimed UFC had offered him a \$10 million eight year deal where he would only fight once, against Daniel Puder. He cut a pro wrestling style promo on Puder, and I don't know if he was working or not, but he sounded like he wasn't working, claiming Puder went on the internet and said he beat him (not true-worse, Angle said he never saw it because he never goes on the internet), made up T-shirts about him (true) and was trying to get rich off his name (true). He actually refused to mention his name, just calling him at first "The guy from Tough Enough whose name I'm not even going to say." Angle conceded Puder put him in a "hammerlock." He said he went into that skirmish with a broken neck, weighed 208 pounds and had 14 inch arms that day. He said he was worried about the two big guys (Justice Smith and Daniel Rodimar) and not Puder, who he said today he guaranteed he could beat in 40 seconds. Ultimately, he again blamed Vince McMahon for putting him in that position in the condition he was in. On the conference call, he complained that White only wanted him for one match, and that's it, but on Bubba, he categorized that at his age, he thinks he probably can only do one match. He said he thought he was going to UFC, and praised White heavily, but said he was a lot like Vince McMahon in that he wanted exclusive rights and that was the deal-breaker. Angle said White told him because of the great story, Angle vs. Puder would be the biggest PPV match they ever had. Angle said it would have been, but it would have all been because of him fighting. He categorized Puder as calling around trying to get the match with him (in actuality, it was Angle's

people brokering an MMA deal who called Puder asking about his interest in being an opponent for one of the newer promotions, and independently, when White contacted Angle, with Lesnar signed with Hero's, he came up with Puder as the opponent. Puder may have called White or White may have come to the decision because it was kind of the most obvious decision. It's got a story, and if Angle had any potential as a fighter he's be able to beat Puder, who is unbeaten but also untested. As soon as the interview hit the internet, two more companies (Strike Force is one, the other I'm not at liberty to disclose) threw their hat into the ring trying to get Angle vs. Puder on PPV, without any kind of restrictions on Angle about doing pro wrestling, simply as a name value match to up the profile of the newer companies. At least one would be offering Angle a significant percentage of PPV for doing the match, on his timetable, next year. Even with Angle's name value, nobody other than UFC is going to be able to do a monster PPV number at this point, because they are the only ones with the strong franchise and the television to get the story over. I can't say anything certain about the veracity of those figures.. It sounds insane, but as of press time, nobody in Pride or UFC has denied them. We do know White offered Angle more than TNA did. White's deal with both Angle and Puder is that he had no interest in giving them exposure on his TV, and after one match, them taking their feud to pro wrestling, or either using a win in a high profile UFC match to help their profiles doing pro wrestling. To both, he was adamant, you're a pro wrestler or a fighter, but you can't do both. On Bubba, Angle claimed he would beat Chuck Liddell if he had six months of training, because he was too fast for Liddell and could take him down, and that he'd also beat Tito Ortiz. Angle noted his contract allows him to make his own decisions regarding a potential acting career as well as doing a fight or television or anything else. Angle said all the right things about both TNA, Carter and Spike TV, as well as the TNA talent. He said there was only a short list of great wrestlers in WWE that he could have a five-star match with, but there are so many more great wrestlers in TNA. The only name he specified was Samoa Joe, who looks to be his first program. He said he sees WWE going into a downward spiral and that's why he wanted out. He was adamant that he called for the meeting on 8/25, but tried to intimate that he worked Vince by acting erratic so he would get his release, at the time, to do MMA. "I asked for the meeting. I asked for my release. and Vince wanted us to say it was mutual to save face." Angle said he never thought Vince would give him his release, so at the meeting, he did what he needed to do to get it, saying he was surprised Vince gave it to him. Hulk Hogan claimed Angle threatened suicide and that's why the company was so quick to let him go. Angle admitted he cried at the meeting and acted like he was nuts, but indicated it was all an act to work Vince. "I did what I had to do to get a release." This was not the first time he's said this. Within two weeks after being gone, I know of three people he said this to in WWE. They were all skeptical, and one was a lot more than skeptical. The problem with this story is on 8/21, while I was not told Angle was going to be fired, I was told Angle was going to be gone, which I assumed was time off or another suspension. It was Vince's decision to release him, give him a severance package, give him his money in one lump sum as opposed to weekly in payroll and not even put in a non-compete clause (because they'd have to pay him a regular check during the period) so there were no ties whatsoever between Angle and the company. You can only speculate why Vince would make such a decision. He said the second WWE statement, talking about how Angle was erratic at the meeting and where WWE claimed it was their decision was because they knew he was going to TNA and were trying to save face. Fact is, nobody in WWE

had a clue he was going to TNA. The only person outside of Angle's inner circle and four people in TNA that were told was White, and all kept it a secret. He said at the time of the release, Vince talked with him about coming back. In fact, Angle himself after the release talked publicly about having an open door to come back, and wanting to come back when healed, a contradiction of the idea Vince was a horrible person he couldn't wait to get away from to the point he turned Pillman and worked himself into being let go. Even after being let go, at first, Angle was proposing angles to come back early next year to be part of Wrestlemania. But when so many MMA offers and the TNA offer came to him, he had not been talking in that direction in later weeks and all in WWE assumed he was going to MMA, and hoped he wouldn't. He first said when asked if he'd consider working for McMahon again, "I don't think I'll ever work for Vince McMahon again, but you can never say never." His wife then said something not audible to him, and he said; "My wife wouldn't let me work for Vince McMahon again." He also said he expects to work for TNA for the next 30 years, and mentioned being a promoter, an agent, a writer, or working in talent relations after his active career is over. He also was adamant he made the right decision not to have neck fusion surgery like so many wrestlers, instead getting the minimally invasive surgery pioneered by Pittsburgh's Dr. Hae-dong Jho. He called the surgery that Benoit (who he called his favorite opponent), Edge, Lita, Bob Holly, Scotty 2 Hotty, Rhino, Steve Austin and others went through as being "prehistoric." He said all of those guys are hurting today and don't have enough flexibility in their necks. Angle claimed he had full flexibility in his neck thanks to Dr. Jho's surgery. He said he's tried to convince the wrestlers and the office that the old way is passe, but said because he got hurt by a chair shot to the head which undid the first surgery, that everyone thinks it just leads to a great injury risk even though you get back in the ring sooner without having discs fused. He claims to be healthy now and there is no reason he shouldn't be wrestling. He said his head says he can wrestle, his heart says he can wrestle, the doctors say he can wrestle, and God says he can wrestle. He claimed he would go to McMahon with merchandising ideas, but McMahon told him that Angle doesn't do merchandise. Fact is, Angle was never a top merchandise seller. Angle on Bubba claimed it was because he negotiated into his contract a 30% royalty on merchandise while Cena and Mysterio only get 5% of their merchandise and that's why he wasn't given merchandise. He was given a forum to knock the angles on the death of Eddie Guerrero, but wouldn't do it, and beat around the bush on the issue. He claimed Guerrero's death had nothing to do with his situation as Guerrero died from exhaustion and not drugs (the autopsy stated differently and the condition of his heart and internal organs strongly suggested differently). He said he hopes all money WWE makes in angles or merchandise on the death goes directly to his family, and then said he can guarantee that's not the case. Angle pushed the idea that when TNA gets a two-hour television show, they'll be able to showcase wrestling. He knocked men kissing other men's ass and live sex, saying if TNA has a two hour show, they'll give the main event 30 minutes, and said the company now has the best writer in wrestling in Vince Russo, and the best wrestler in the world in himself. He complained that McMahon wouldn't let him go babyface last fall when he wrestled Cena and the crowds every night were cheering him and booing Cena. However, the truth is, when he was moved to ECW, it was to work as a babyface. He asked "Why is the best wrestler in the company not on SummerSlam." As noted, when he was fired, the booking for the ECW title match at SummerSlam was changed to get Angle back on the show because he had

complained about it so much. Then he got the groin pull a week before the show and was pulled off the show. Angle also complained that after Austin and Rock had turns at the top, he should have had a run pushed the same way. He asked why he wasn't pushed more than Vince's son-in-law and Shawn Michaels. When Bubba tried to get him to say HHH is a cancer, he would not say it, only saying he shouldn't be both writing the show and wrestling. He claimed HHH only put guys over who were not a threat to him. He claimed he put over Benoit, knowing Benoit was great in the ring but didn't have the charisma to take his spot. And he put over Cena, who had the charisma, but wasn't good in the ring. He said HHH wouldn't put him over because he had both and could have taken his spot. He praised HHH as a wrestler but said he had no respect for him as a person. When asked if it was true he wasn't happy being moved to ECW, he said it was. He said there was nobody in ECW he could work with, other than Van Dam, and he did say he carried Sabu to a good wrestling match and said it was a fun match to do, and noted Show was one of his best friends but they'd wrestled a million times. He said the big problem with the ECW talent was when WWE made him an agent in ECW (those in the company deny he was ever made an agent) to teach the wrestlers and they were getting upset that he was giving pointers to guys who had been around for 15 years. "I have a gift. I can watch a match, and tell you what you did right and wrong." He said the guys who had been around longer than him were complaining about him giving them suggestions. Angle was also pushing that he would win the title from Show, lose it to Van Dam (or Show), win it back, and wanted to defend it against HHH at Wrestlemania, with the build that it would be the two ten-time world champions squaring off.

October 30, 2006

-Besides Daniel Puder (UFC first and now Strike Force), Brock Lesnar (Hero's) and Frank Shamrock (World Fighter), Angle also had a major fight deal proposed for him against Kimo.

-Angle's wife Karen went into labor the day before Bound for Glory and he missed the fan fest. There were about 600 people at the fan fest the day before, which was considered really good. They all were given something that enabled them to get into the arena at 1 p.m. the day of the PPV for a personal meet & greet with Angle, since he had been the biggest star advertised. Karen, who is expecting a boy, had not given birth at press time. As for the idea Angle would only work major shows, it was announced he would be wrestling on both the 11/10 house show in Philadelphia at the ECW Arena and 11/11 in East Hartford, CT.

November 6, 2006

-Kurt Angle and Vince Russo have been talking a lot because Angle is being given a lot of power over his own programs. In many ways, it appears that Angle is going to be the new Jeff Jarrett, as far as being the person the Shows are built around, which as long as he's healthy, is for the better. Angle's situation is interesting because he's watching everything closely and giving his opinions on everything. His mentality is that they need to be a more serious edged promotion. Unlike in ECW, where the wrestlers weren't in awe of him because most had more experience than he did, and didn't like his giving advice and suggestions, most of the guys here

see him as a legit superstar and have a 180 degree different reaction when he takes time to give them suggestions.

-As things stand now, Angle's first match, unless they book him to wrestle on the TV special (which is taped on 11 /6), will be at the Alhambra in Philadelphia on 11/10.

-Speaking of Angle, his wife gave birth to his first son over the past week.

-Angle was on Bubba the Love Sponge this week and said that he could beat Daniel Puder with one arm tied behind his back. Bubba should have been like a territorial wrestling promoter when they fed the line. Puder responded on Observer Live saying Angle must be on drugs ifhe said something that silly, and said that UFC, Strike Force and WFA have specifically said they would put the match together if Angle were to agree. He also said he'll fight Angle with a winner-take-all purse. Considering that's probably the biggest one day payoff he'll ever have in his life, that probably isn't the wisest of moves. Even though Angle's doing a great job of cutting promos on this, I really don't think the match will ever happen.

November 13, 2006

WFA officials have been calling TNA. I'd guess they'd want to try to set up a cross-promotional deal involving Angle. WFA definitely wants to make Angle vs. Puder and I could see the suggestion of a cross-promotion feud... In both cases, whether it be Angle vs. Sapp or Angle vs. Puder, and I know the former is being considered and don't believe the latter is, they have to realize that whatever internet or international fame or hype means absolutely nothing as far as today goes in pro wrestling. If they expect either idea to come in and mean something without extensive build and that the TNA storytelling will tell the tale, they are kidding themselves.

November 15, 2006

NEW JAPAN: The company has made the decision to run the Tokyo Dome on January 4th as has been the tradition as this would be the 16th straight year... The rumors are they will try and get Kurt Angle to work the show although we've heard nothing in that direction.

November 20, 2006

-Angle's contract is specified as being for four dates per month, which are listed as two TV's, one PPV and one house show, although he will do more if asked like this month where he's doing several house shows. Obviously that would change if TNA gets a two-hour show and starts taping weekly.

-Angle has done tons of media this past week trying to publicize the prime time debut. He was on Bubba the Love Sponge on 11/9 and Bubba brought up Puder, who was on the show a few days earlier. Bubba buried Puder when he had him on saying that Angle would knock him out and he was trying to make money off Angle's name. Bubba asked Puder if he'd fight Angle for

free and Puder agreed to it. Bubba then asked Angle if he'd do so, and asked Angle if he would do the fight on the show, and Angle agreed, but then said that Dixie Carter would have to okay it. That's funny only because his TNA contract stipulates he can do MMA, so that sounds like he was accepting and denying at the same time. All I can say is if either of those guys say they'll do it for free, they both should be locked up, because there are several promotions that will be glad to pay them for the match. Well, for sure, Angle isn't doing anything like that for no money. Angle said they could do an anything goes match with eye gouging legal. Angle called Puder a "moron" and "piece of shit" and said that he needs help. Angle claimed when Dana White wanted to make the match, he told him he knew the fight would only last 40 seconds and Angle would knock Puder out in the first round, but White said it would also be the biggest buy rate in UFC history, only because of Kurt and not because of Puder. He claimed White told him he didn't want him to knock Puder out right away but toy with him. He said the first time they had their skirmish that he couldn't even do five push-ups but he still dominated Puder. I hope he's hyping a fight because otherwise, that didn't come off too well. He said that when Puder was in WWE he had a match with Shelton Benjamin and Benjamin told him that Puder really sucks. He said that Vince saw it and got mad because he thought Puder was going to develop into this hot shooter. By the way, there was never a Puder vs. Benjamin match in WWE or OVW. What happened was that in Fresno the afternoon of the 2005 Royal Rumble, when some of the guys were in the ring with Puder to help teach him to wrestle, Benjamin asked him to amateur wrestle with him. Benjamin was third in the national as a heavyweight and as a wrestler is way out of Puder's class, and took him down once or twice (I've heard both versions) fairly easily. Puder then asked Benjamin if he wanted to try submission wrestling with him and Benjamin said he didn't know submissions. Vince was around, thought things were breaking down in the ring and there was shooting going on right before a major PPV, and got mad at everyone involved. Angle claimed Puder has no fight training (he's actually part of what would be considered the No. 2 fight team in the country behind only the Miletich camp) and that his only fighting experience is paying \$200 to fight bums and crackheads in his garage. He said that Puder can't take a punch and his stand-up is lousy. Angle said that if Dixie Carter allows it, after he beats Puder he will pull down his pants and rub his balls in Puder's face. Karen Angle said she doesn't want Angle to ever fight Puder because she doesn't want Puder to get the notoriety and then Angle said he would knock Puder out and his wife would go into the ring and take a shit on Puder's face. Angle was supposed to be on plugging his matches with Abyss and Joe, and well, he barely mentioned them although claimed the Abyss match was a match of the year and the Joe match would be a match of the year. Angle also has admitted publicly a few interviews a few things we'd heard off the record previously. His failed drug test with WWE was for steroids, because Dr. David Black wouldn't accept the prescription (or the date on the prescription expired according to another version) as he will only accept steroid prescriptions written by surgeons. That ended up being the cause of some issues. Angle said he was one of eight steroid failures, all of whom had prescriptions, but not from a surgeon, but he claimed the others were allowed to let it slide and weren't suspended. Angle said he turned up positive for steroids due to getting a cortisone shot in his neck. I'm not sure how that would happen as even though cortisone is a corticosteroid, that would not be an illegal drug in WWE's drug policy, and it does not register as Deca or another steroid that would be a policy violation. He claimed between the loss of income for 30 days and other financial punishment that the test failure cost him \$125,000 (the figure we

had heard was \$83,000 if you are keeping score). He claimed Vince told him after that he would make it up to him. When Batista went down with the triceps tear and Angle went to Smackdown to win the title, he was actually the second choice. The original plan was for Michaels to go over and win the title for a short run, but Michaels turned it down (he has religious meetings on Wednesdays, hence can't be on the road on Tuesdays on a regular basis, or at least that was the way we heard the story at the time). He claimed he suffered another neck injury in his final Raw match (this was the match he lost to end the program the day before going to Smackdown and winning the Battle Royal for the title Batista had vacated) when he gave Michaels an Angle slam off the top rope and Michaels was lighter than expected and thus in his normal push off, he rotated into a bad landing, fracturing his C-7 and T-1 vertebrae, although he was able to continue wrestling on it.

-Some more notes from our interview and other interviews he's done this weekend, as well as some off the air stuff we talked about. When he had his meeting with McMahon which ended up with the release, McMahon came out with pages and pages of computer print-outs of erratic text messages he had sent to both Vince and John Laurinaitis to use against him in the meeting. At the meeting, as Angle somehow got under Vince's skin, Vince yelled at him to go take his \$30 million offer in Japan. Since the meeting, he claims to have had no direct contact with McMahon, although says that he did send a message to McMahon saying that he was going to lead TNA into passing WWE. He goes back-and-forth from praising McMahon heavily as a person and being mad at him for keeping guys on the schedule he does, but hey, most people with a brain have mixed feelings on the guy. He said if he was running WWE, he would limit guys to ten dates per month and he would also combine the brands back into one, creating a wide variety of potential PPV main event matches. When asked who the biggest asshole in WWE was, he would not give an answer, but then said that if it wasn't for HHH, he believes he would still be in the company. He brought up the story from 2000, in Angle's first full year on the main roster, when the decision was made for Angle to beat Rock for the WWE title. HHH at a company meeting complained that Angle too small to hold the title. Someone (I believe Gerald Brisco but the name could be wrong) looked at him at the time, and remember that he was not the son-in-law although he and Stephanie were dating, and said, "How about you trying him on (for real) to see if he's too small to be champion" He calls Dixie Carter his "business partner" and said that at some point he expects to be running TNA. He said while his signed a contract for less money than his \$1 million per year deal he was making in WWE, he's earning far more per match, and expects to end up earning more because he will be combining acting with wrestling and still expects to fight as well, since he's not going to be wrestling full-time. He claimed Spike TV already has a regular role for him that would require one day per week of acting on one of their new TV shows. He's open to wrestling in Japan but has made no commitments. He also said that if he had a minor injury, he would lie to Dixie Carter about it to keep wrestling, but if it's something serious, he would take time off. His deal is that if he feels he's hurting badly, he will immediately be pulled from active duty in the ring and just appear on television doing promos. He also said that right now as long as he feels like he does, he wants to work all the company house shows. He said he never wanted to go to ECW, but Vince told him he would be the face of the company. He said he was never even in the original ECW. When he got there, because Heyman was the writer, RVD was written as the top star. Angle

was constantly pushing for an ECW title run and getting more and more frustrated when it wasn't happening, and that led to a lot of the problems with the split. As noted before, the original title plan was for Van Dam to have a lengthy title reign to "establish" the title, at least through Mania if not longer, but when Van Dam was busted and suspended, they went with Show (Angle was also suspended at the time) and at least for a time, McMahon was against allowing Van Dam back to the top position because of what happened, but of late he's softened his stance on it.

-Angle appeared on 11/4 on Spike's "Casino Cinema" show and noted he had broken his neck four times in total. Beth O asked him why his mother would let him back in a wrestling ring. He said, "I'm 32 years old. I don't need to ask my mother!" Kurt was born December 9, 1968, so that makes him almost 38.

-Mysterio's contract expires right about the time he would be ready to return. I believe it's due around May or June. **I would strongly suspect an Angle recruiting mission.**

November 27, 2006

-Angle told Sabin that he was a great wrestler but that he didn't like his look. Angle said he looked too dirty and didn't stand out. Angle later made the suggestion, and apparently was serious, that Sabin do a gimmick where he would be like Pig Pen in the old "Peanuts" comic strip and have food and dirt all over him. Let's just say a lot of people excited about Angle having creative input after hearing that were shaking their heads.

-A funny sort of Undertaker/Hogan update with Angle from their 1991 Survivor Series match where Undertaker beat Hogan with a tombstone to win the WWF title, which was a set up for the "Tuesday in Texas" PPV the next week, and the eventual title being held up for the 1992 Rumble for Flair to win. Angle was on Bubba and said how Undertaker always tells the story, but also had to note with it being Bubba's show he can't say anything bad about Hogan but wouldn't say anything bad under any circumstances against Undertaker. As noted here a few times, Hogan was injured and taken to the hospital after getting the tombstone and for years Undertaker felt horrible about it, and also said Vince was furious about him not correctly protecting the top star. Angle said Vince then took the title off Undertaker because of it (not true, as that title being held up scenario was planned all along to build for Rumble). Years later, Undertaker saw the tape and saw Hogan's head was nowhere near the mat and he was very mad at Hogan thinking Hogan was working the injury and it made him look like a bad worker to the rest of the crew. Anyway, Angle said that Undertaker told him Hogan tensed up so much in anticipating the move that he got a stinger from tensing even though his head never hit the mat.

December 4, 2006

-The Kurt Angle vs. Samoa Joe match at Genesis was booked to go 25:00 and Kurt had dispensation to go 30:00 if he thought it would make it better. A lot of people who were aware of this were shocked when he went home early and to the best of our knowledge, nobody had an explanation for it other than it was Angle's call and that's when he called for the finish. Again, while Angle never gave an explanation, the consensus among the wrestlers is he got tired way early and called it, pointing to the fact he had told Joe about a spot where he would give him ten straight German suplexes. Going in, that was a big deal because Joe is such a big guy to do

that spot with. On the third one, you could see him give out and he didn't try a fourth and went pretty quickly to the end from there. As noted last week, everyone on the show was told to stay with in their parameters and not go over because they wanted 30 minutes left for Angle vs. Joe because they were well aware everyone was buying for that match and the idea was to produce the match of the year. That's a heavy goal, worse because they basically were advertising it ahead of time (a few years back, WWF on house shows for Eddie Guerrero vs. Mysterio matches actually did print and radio ads advertising them as "match of the year candidates" and Eddie's back was so bad by that point there was no way he could perform at that level on house shows).

-The reaction to Angle has also changed greatly over the past week plus. It's starting to be the same reaction as in WWE. Angle is taking a super hands on approach, talking to everyone about their matches, promos and rubbing people the wrong way when he tells wrestlers that he's the greatest wrestler of all time. It's one thing for others to say he's one of the greatest, but you sure don't tell other wrestlers that when you are critiquing them. He's also telling them that he's going to be running the company. Right now, for public consumption, Jarrett is 100% sticking up for Angle, as he has to. The one thing is, no matter how erratic people say Angle's behavior is, and the company has to be vigilant to protect Angle from himself health-wise, he still has the ability to project himself like a major superstar to the viewing public, far more than anyone else on the roster

December 6, 2006

Homicide was apparently really upset when Angle popped his ear in the TV match that aired this week. He was so mad he wanted to go right there, but he kept himself under control.

December 11, 2006

-After a six month disaster in the revival of the ECW brand, the next step in what many on the roster fear is its disintegration, came after the December to Dismember PPV when Vince McMahon sent Paul Heyman home... With Kurt Angle as the top star, that would decrease the odds of Heyman in TNA, if that's even a direction he'd be interested in, although nothing is impossible. Angle and Heyman were on bad terms at the end since Angle was mad Heyman didn't make him champion in ECW and pushed Van Dam ahead of him. But those things in wrestling usually end up being worked out if need be, but this is not going to happen any time soon. Nobody in power would want him in.

-The "George Michael Sports Machine" syndicated show that airs nationally on Sunday nights, is working on a major feature on Angle. I expect it won't be hard hitting, but we'll see.

-When Bret Hart was on Derek & Romaine, a show on the Gay/Lesbian Sirius channel, on 11/30, a caller asked about Wrestlemania and asked if he was uncomfortable being at the Hall of Fame... They asked if there were any wrestlers today he'd like to wrestle. He said Angle and Mysterio. He said he'd have loved to work with Mysterio, but if he had to pick only one, it would be Angle, noting he woke up from a dream once where he was wrestling a match with Angle.

December 18, 2006

-This week's Kurt Angle appearance on 12/8 on "Bubba the Love Sponge" once again didn't focus on his PPV match two days later, but on him claiming he would be doing not just an MMA match, but four MMA matches. He claimed the first would take place on the TNA PPV in May or

June, and that he had been training that style but wanted six months of good training before doing such a match. He said his first opponent would be Tito Ortiz, Chuck Liddell, Randy Couture, Ken Shamrock or Daniel Puder, and then cut most of his promo on Puder. He claimed it would do 1 million buys (if it was in UFC and promoted off UFC television, it every well may, but it's not doing 100,000 in TNA). He also claimed the match would have head-butts legal. First off, Angle is never going to fight against a real fighter, because if he was, he'd have taken the much higher money offer and done UFC. TNA has been talking for some time about the idea of doing business with shootfighters, as noted here, whether it be Bob Sapp, Ken Shamrock, Puder, Don Frye or whomever but it was always within the context of working a program. While everyone assumed from Angle's promo the deal was with Puder, there is nothing remotely close to such a deal at this point, although Angle himself is strong on the idea of doing a worked shootfight angle so he wasn't just talking for no purpose but with an idea in mind. While this can vary by the state, it is extremely doubtful any athletic commission will allow a shoot match on the same show with working matches because they don't want to be party to misleading the public. In addition, there is nowhere in the U.S. where a company would be allowed to put on a legit match in which head-butts were legal

-Whenever Angle is introduced before a match, they use the tag line, "The only Olympic gold medalist in pro wrestling history." Of course, that's false, although Angle is the only gold medalist currently active full-time as a pro wrestler. He is, by far, the biggest world wide pro wrestling star who was once an Olympic gold medalist. He's not the only one-time major world heavyweight champion who was a gold medalist, as Henri Deglane (1924 Superheavyweight Greco-Roman wrestling) went on to become a world champion recognized in North America in the 1931 battle of the bite in Montreal double-cross finish beating Strangler Lewis on a DQ. He returned to France, and during the 30s, 40s and into the early 50s, was the biggest pro wrestling star in the history of that country. The list of gold medalists that we have who became regular pro wrestlers is: Dimitrios Tofalos (1906, superheavyweight weightlifting, Greece), Robin Reed (1924, 135 pounds freestyle wrestling, U.S.), Russell Vis (1924, 146 pounds, freestyle wrestling, U.S.), John Spellman (1924, 191 pounds, freestyle wrestling, U.S.), Bobby Pearce (1932, 123 pounds freestyle wrestling, U.S.), Jack Van Bebber (1932, 159 pounds freestyle wrestling, U.S.), Pete Mehringer (1932, 192 pounds, freestyle wrestling, U.S.), Paul Anderson (1956, superheavyweight weightlifting, U.S.), Wilfred Dietrich (1960, superheavyweight freestyle wrestling, Germany), Anton Geesink (1964, openweight judo, Netherlands), Willem Ruska (1972, open and superheavyweight judo, Netherlands) and Leon Spinks (1976, 179 pounds, boxing, U.S.). Of that list, DeGlane and Angle would have been the only true superstars as pro wrestlers. Geesink spent three years as a consistent main eventer in All Japan, wrestling against numerous top stars and being a protected star, but in the ring was awful and was let go after his original big money contract expired. Ruska had a similar story when he started with New Japan a few years later. Anderson was a minor star as a world's strongest man gimmick performer, but nowhere near the level of star as Ken Patera (who didn't place in the Olympics but garnered fame as an Olympic weightlifter before being recruited by Verne Gagne into pro wrestling). This list isn't including gimmick pro wrestlers like Muhammad Ali, Shota Chochoshvili, David Gobezhvili, Alexander Karel in, Karl Malone or Joe Frazier, who were also gold medalists. MMA has had several gold medalists, including Pride regulars Hidehiko Yoshida, Pawel Nastula and Makoto Takimoto, all coming out of judo, and one-time appearances of wrestlers Rulon Gardner (who considered a WWE offer on two occasions although the offer was not for nearly as much money as Gardner stated publicly), while K-1 used Karam Gaber Ibrahim (who WWE also had interest in but the transition of head of talent relations from Jim Ross to John Laurinaitis saw a philosophy change when it came to hiring. Even if that hadn't. happened, Gaber was getting well paid as Egypt's first gold medalist in modern times to stay in the country and train for 2008, made a WWE career a longshot) for one fight.

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-Jeff Jarrett has been talking with Bob Sapp about doing a program with Angle in the so-called shootfight cage match for the next program after Joe. The original choice was Daniel Puder. but that fell apart, apparently over an embarrassingly low money offer. If that's the mentality, how do they expect to get Sapp, who turned down \$1 million per year from Vince McMahon, and isn't going to come for anywhere less than ten times what it would take to get Puder?

-Angle, Joe Rogan and Dana White were all presenters at the Video Game awards which aired on 12/13 on Spike but was taped a few days earlier. With all that hype and promotion, that show did something like an 0.8 rating. Angle went crazy, tearing off his shirt, on stage. Nobody knew what to make of it but he was trying to do something for attention. Backstage, and this was not on the show, Angle was telling people he was going to face Couture, Ortiz or Liddell in a match this year. The only reason anyone knows anything about this is because Mike Swick of UFC was back there doing some stuff and filmed it. If this was wrestling, that would seem like evidence of an angle, but it's not in this case.

-Joe was all black and blue at TV before he hurt his knee, as Angle is giving everyone a beating

-Angle filmed his segment on the George Michael Sports Machine this past week. Not sure of the air date. Told he was asked one question, and answered it with a 30 minute monologue that will have to be heavily edited.